

Stalin was afraid of an army created by his own hands. But most of all he was afraid of aviation.

Stalin's inflamed imagination quite often drew a terrible picture: planes were bombing the Kremlin (or a dacha in Kuntsevo, and anywhere), and his loyal Chekists were helplessly brandishing Mausers. Or some fanatic terrorist will simply crash his plane into a house, a train, a steamer, on which Comrade Stalin will be at that moment. And if many historians try to explain such fears of Comrade Stalin by the fact that the great leader suffered from paranoia, then they simply do not know the facts.

In May 1935, the USSR showed off to an astonished world the largest aircraft ever built, a four-engine giant called the Maxim Gorky. (Gorky himself was still alive and watched from the mausoleum at the May Day celebrations as a huge airship sailed over Red Square, bearing his name on giant wings.) Then it was announced that on May 18 members of the Central Committee and the government, headed by a comrade Stalin. Stalin, of course, was not going to fly and took measures so that members of the government would do the same. Nikolai Blagin, one of the best pilots of the then aviation, was supposed to escort the giant car on the I-5 fighter. Nobody knew that none of the members of the Central Committee was going to follow the campaign scenario. Instead, those who created this winged miracle flew on the plane - engineers, designers, craftsmen and workers with their families. When the air dreadnought sailed majestically over Moscow, Blagin, who took off from another airfield, quickly overtook him, suddenly threw the plane into a dive and crashed into the wing of the car in front of thousands of horrified spectators watching this scene from the ground. Part of the wing, along with the engine, fell off, and the Maxim Gorky, enveloped in fire and smoke, turning over in the air and falling apart, rushed to the ground with a terrible howl, which it crashed into in the fire and thunder of a powerful explosion.

The investigation was the most thorough, since Stalin did not doubt the intentional "terrorist attack", especially since Blagin's connections with the seasoned Trotskyists - Baranov and Sergeyev quickly became clear. They led the Soviet Air Force in the early 1930s, but they were so uncontrollable that they both had to be put on the same plane with the staff, and the plane was blown up. Perhaps Blagin wanted to take revenge on Stalin for his friends? The entire leadership of the then Air Force disappeared within a year, and Yakov Alksnis was placed at the head of the Air Force, who also had to be shot in 1938 for insufficient controllability. On June 27, 1937, fighter pilot Oleg Kapitonov on an I-15 aircraft, flying low over the Stalinist dacha, over which flights were strictly prohibited in a vast area of about 100 square meters. km, crashed into the forest some two hundred meters from the outer fence. In the pilot's tablet, recovered from the wreckage, a map of the area was found and a summer cottage complex was noted.

Almost the entire regiment in which Kapitonov served was arrested. The investigation revealed a plot to kill the leader.

The case of the marshals revealed horrifying things in general. Especially how traitors and "enemies of the people" were going to use aviation, planning to exterminate Comrade Stalin and the entire Bolshevik Central Committee [44].

Since November 1939, the head of the Air Force was Yakov Smushkevich, by that time Twice Hero of the Soviet Union. Twice a hero, even in our time, is a rarity, and even in those years it was a truly unique phenomenon. Under the name of General Douglas Smushkevich, he fought in Spain and, with his actions in the air, brought even the cold-blooded Hemingway into ecstasy. Upon his return from Spain, Smushkevich received his first gold star.

He earned the second star at Khalkhin Gol, having a reputation as the country's largest specialist in

combat use of aviation. One day, Stalin read a summary of German intelligence, analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of the Soviet military leadership, which said: "Smushkevich can be called Tukhachevsky in the field of aviation." Stalin remembered the comparison of Smushkevich with Tukhachevsky and, for a start, removed him from his post. There was a temptation to shoot him right out of harm's way, but he restrained himself and transferred Smushkevich first to the post of inspector general of the Air Force, and then to the assistant chief of the General Staff for aviation. Smushkevich regarded all these movements as dismissal, realizing that he had fallen out of favor with the leader.

In place of Smushkevich, the leader, unexpectedly for many, appointed 29-year-old Pavel Rychagov, promoted to general almost directly from lieutenants. A desperate fighter pilot, a virtuoso of aerobatics and air combat, Rychagov, as they say, "was a pilot by the grace of God." At 24, while commanding a squadron in Spain, where he was known as Pablo Palancaré, he once engaged six enemy fighters at once. Having shot down two, he was shot down himself, landing by parachute in the very center of Madrid on Castellano Boulevard. This episode, which later appeared in many feature films about Stalin's adventure in Spain, made an impression on Comrade Stalin himself. Rychagov, a short, dense, strong man, distinguished by a cheerful disposition and truly Russian prowess, liked Stalin. He was awarded the title of Hero and quickly went up the hill on the front line, showing the skills of a capable administrator. He directed aviation operations on Khasan, commanded a group of "volunteer" fighters in China and aviation of the 9th Army during the war with Finland, trying to establish an air bridge with encircled units.

In August 1940, Stalin promoted Rychagov to lieutenant general, awarded him another Order of Lenin, and gave him command of the air force.

At this point, the air force was unfolding into a giant armada, which, in terms of the number of combat vehicles, surpassed even the American figures achieved only at the end of the Second World War.

On November 29, Stalin summoned Rychagov, his chief of staff, General Nikishev, and his deputy for armaments and supplies, General Astakhov. The pilots, as usual, started with numbers. If on January 1, 1940, 209 air regiments were deployed in the western military districts, armed with 12,540 combat vehicles of various types, plus 40 air regiments of long-range aviation (LBA) with 2,300 heavy bombers, then by the end of the year these figures were almost doubled. Of course, they will decrease somewhat due to the decommissioning of old aircraft, nevertheless, the number of combat aircraft on January 1, 1940 will be approximately 24,000. The number of flight schools and schools with three-, two- and one-year terms of study has increased almost two and a half times. The number of training aircraft has been increased to 6800 [45].

The vast majority of airfields, Rychagov stressed, as prescribed by Comrade Stalin, are as close as possible to the border. Some are up to one kilometer away. Aircraft on takeoff are forced to turn over the territories of neighboring countries, including East Prussia and the German part of Poland.

Stalin nods graciously. "Baby" Rychagov clearly justifies the trust placed in him. Stalin is interested in how his latest innovation was perceived in schools and in parts of the Air Force. The innovation was that Stalin, tormented by fears of the Air Force, decided to deprive all future pilots of their officer ranks and release them from schools as sergeants on the rights of military service [46].

Unlike almost all of his predecessors, Rychagov did not go through the necessary school of political intrigue, since he never served in political commissars and commissars. He was a direct person, sometimes even too much. And he was, remember, only 29 years old. He

he even recently married the famous pilot Maria Nesterenko.

That is why he honestly answered Stalin that, of course, everyone was dissatisfied with the innovation.

"I'll say this, Comrade Stalin," Rychagov said hoarsely, blushing, "it's not even about rank, but about the prestige of the profession. In aviation, the pilot is the most important thing, and everything else is secondary. There will be no enthusiasm. How are we going to recruit people to schools now? Nobody will go..."

In surprise, the leader even took his pipe out of his mouth:

- How will it go? Outpost!

Leverage in vain considered Stalin capable of ill-conceived decisions.

A resolution was already prepared, which will be adopted in a week (December 7) - on the rejection of the voluntary formation of flight schools and the transition to the forced recruitment of persons "whose health and educational level meets the requirements of the Air Force flight personnel service."

I will do everything for you, Stalin promised, just work!

Who always pleased Comrade Stalin was the tankers. The Soviet Union could rightfully be considered the birthplace of mass conveyor tank building. He also tried to teach the Germans this art, but the Germans turned out to be useless students in every respect. The figures of their tank production caused ironic smiles from all specialists in Moscow, including Comrade Stalin himself. And there was nothing to say about the quality of German tanks. Their latest model, called the "T-IV", was a short-barreled, narrow-tracked, gasoline-powered vehicle with 25 mm frontal armor and a top speed of 32 km/h. I could not even believe that this was the last achievement of German military-technical thought. Soviet intelligence was ordered to check if the Germans had any secret tank, which they did not yet display and kept as a surprise. It turned out that not only on the conveyor, but also in development. And the entire German tank fleet was estimated by Soviet intelligence at about 7500 vehicles, which, as it turned out later, was a clear exaggeration.

No one in the USSR, not even the head of the Main Armored Directorate of the Red Army, Lieutenant General Fedorenko and the chief inspector of tank troops, Major General Vershinin, knew exactly the number of the tank fleet. But summing up the applications of the districts, the command of the armored forces found out that after the most intensive exercises in the summer and autumn of 1940, 21,000 tanks or 43% of the entire tank fleet located in the districts needed to be repaired to varying degrees (from two hours to overhaul).

The exercises and field tests showed that the Germans had practically no means of defense against them. As for the tank confrontation, the same tests showed that the projectile from the T-34 tank pierced the armor of the German T-IV tank from a distance of 1500-2000 meters, while the shells of the German tank pierced the armor of the T-34 from a distance of only 500 meters, and even then only if they hit the side or rear of the T-34. They did not take frontal armor.

But besides the T-34, Stalin was preparing another tank surprise for the astonished world. No one in the world has yet thought of a heavy tank. And in the USSR, they not only thought of it, but already set up its mass production and calculated its modernization capabilities for three subsequent models. This tank was called "KV" (Klim Voroshilov) and was a monstrous fighting vehicle for those times, weighing almost 50 tons, with 80 mm frontal armor and an absolutely incredible 152 mm gun for a tank [47].

But the main advantage of the T-34 and KV tanks was that they had a diesel engine and could go from one gas station: T-34 at a speed of 50 km per hour - 400 kilometers, KV at a speed of 35 km per hour - 330 kilometers. As for the famous BT-7 tank, which has the ability to change tracks for car wheels, it could reach speeds of up to 60 km per hour on tracks and travel 600 kilometers from one refueling, and when standing on wheels when entering European highways, develop speed up to 86 km/h and cover up to 700 kilometers. These were real blitzkrieg tanks, tanks of a swift offensive. (For comparison: the latest German tank "T-IV" could reach speeds of up to 40 km / h on a good road and travel 150-200 kilometers. Tank "T-III" - 40 km / h and travel 150-180 km.)

Artillery, the number of which by the middle of 1941 was supposed to be increased to 100 thousand barrels (including mortars), did not cause much concern to the leader. Here the matter has been correctly set since the old times. And there was still a lot of work ahead. In addition to the celebration of the Constitution Day, it was necessary to hold elections in the newly formed Karelian-Finnish SSR, as well as in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, to check and correct the data of the all-Union census in order to hide the losses from terror and show a steady population growth and, most importantly, to hold an all-army conference, in parallel with the strategic games, to finalize the invasion plan, determining its final date.

Winston Churchill, puffing mercilessly on his invariable cigar, did not listen very attentively to the report on the situation on the Greco-Italian front. Yesterday, November 29, the Germans made a powerful raid on Southampton, destroying almost the entire business center of the city with bombs.

On his way to his residence this morning, Churchill noticed how London had changed. The buildings that were considered the most famous sights of the English capital disappeared.

On all the most famous buildings of churches, monasteries, theaters, ancient palaces, traces of daily and nightly bombings were clearly visible. The bombs hit the Tower of London, but the eight-hundred-year-old walls of the ancient fortress survived. It was worse for the famous majestic St. James Cathedral from Piccadilly - its bell tower collapsed. In the equally famous Drury Lane theater, a bomb, destroying its glass dome, exploded right in the orchestra pit. A huge chandelier collapsed on the seats of the auditorium ...

Churchill read very carefully the transcripts of the conference in Berlin sent to him by intelligence, even together with drafts of new secret protocols. Of course, it would be very unpleasant if these two bandits conspired at least temporarily. If such a thing happened, it is even difficult to imagine the further course of events. Fortunately, as expected, nothing of the sort happened. And it happened just the opposite. Intelligence is increasingly reporting on the transfer of German divisions to the east - to East Prussia and Poland. A little in Romania. Is this drummer going to risk attacking Stalin? This is madness. Even according to the data that the old Intelligence has, the Russian forces are almost three times superior to the German ones. The military attache reported from Moscow that he had accurate data on the presence of 10,000 tanks in the Red Army. 10,000 tanks!

It's impressive! Still, there is something positive about the communist regime. At least, the opportunity to arm themselves in peacetime, without bearing any responsibility either to the parliament, or even more so to the taxpayers. He, Churchill, would be happy to temporarily introduce a communist regime in England in order to

have 10,000 tanks today.

It is not surprising that Hitler froze in some indecision. Need to shake it up a bit. The surprise he will soon receive will force him to make a more concrete decision than the adventurous plans of landing on our islands or capturing Gibraltar.

Of all that he now has in mind, the most realistic is the plan to invade Greece, although this plan is unlikely to be carried out before mid-March.

And if Stalin speaks out without waiting for Hitler to land on our islands? In the end, he may realize that this landing is being led by the nose and that it is impossible. If he comes out wearing the laurel wreath of the liberator of Europe, then the situation on the continent will be even worse.

Much, of course, will depend on the position of the United States. While the election campaign was going on in the United States, Churchill walked around as if with a thorn in his heart, and when the election results became known, he could not stand his emotions and wrote to Roosevelt: the elections are not over, but now I think that you will not mind if I say that I prayed for your success ... "

Now, when the whole world already felt how Roosevelt was stubbornly pushing his way through the thickets of Congress onto the warpath, Churchill prepared a new letter to the US President, where, in particular, he noted:

"As the end of the year draws near, I believe you will expect me to give you the outlook for 1941. I do this frankly and confidently, because it seems to me that the vast majority of American citizens are convinced that the security of the United States, as well as the fate of our two democracies and the civilization we stand for, is connected with the existence and independence of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Only in this way will it be possible to preserve in faithful and courageous hands those bastions of sea power on which control over the Atlantic and Indian Oceans depends. Dominance in the Pacific by the United States Navy and in the Atlantic by the British Navy is necessary for the security and preservation of the trade routes of our countries, and is the most reliable means to prevent the war from reaching the shores of the United States ... "

Further, enumerating the necessary assistance that he expects in the near future from America, Churchill touched on the unique situation in which, for the first time in the last 130 years, the mainstay of British power, its battle fleet, may fall.

"... Now it is much more difficult than it was during the last war. We are deprived of the support of the French, Italian and Japanese fleets, and above all of the United States fleet, which provided us with such important assistance in decisive years. The enemy is in charge of ports all along the northern and western coasts of France. He is increasingly basing his submarines, flying boats, and warplanes in these ports... In the next six or seven months, the comparative power of battleships in home waters will shrink and become less than satisfactory. Mr. President, no one will understand better than you that during these months we will have to think for the first time in this war about operations at sea in which the enemy will have two ships, at least as good as two our best and only modern ship..."

Stalin read a copy of Churchill's letter to Roosevelt before the message was sent across the ocean. This alone proved that the information channel was saddled by British intelligence, but then no one wanted to think about it, since all the intelligence services most of all wanted to demonstrate their efficiency to the leader. It was efficiency that Comrade Stalin liked most of all.

From the text of the letter, he realized that the British were already in direct danger of losing their main trump card, with which Britain had been beating the cards of all its enemies for centuries - dominance at sea.

For almost a year now, the most extensive flow of information to the USSR came from England, where Soviet agent Kim Philby was sitting right in the depths of the British secret service. In addition, the NKVD managed to recruit in September 1940 John Cairncross, secretary to a member of the military cabinet, Lord Hankey. Cairncross sent literally tons of secret documents to the NKVD.

But the most interesting message came from Philby in early December 1940:

"The general directive given to MI5 residencies on the continent, and to the embassies of Britain and Sweden, Switzerland, Portugal, Greece, Hungary and Bulgaria, as well as many countries in South America and Asia, where there are British embassies or consulates, instructs intelligence officers and diplomats in every possible way to exaggerate the rumor about the inevitability of war between Germany and the Soviet Union, which should break out no later than the summer of 1941. Moreover, depending on the specific conditions and the sympathies of the local population and the press, the attacking side in this war should be determined accordingly. An attack can be carried out equally by the Soviet Union against Germany, and Germany against the Soviet Union.

The fact that such an installation was given, Stalin could no longer doubt. Even before receiving this signal from Philby, on November 28, a new message was received from Tokyo from Sorge that the Germans were forming a new reserve army in the Leipzig area, consisting of 40 divisions. 80 divisions are already deployed on the Soviet-German border, another 20 are being transferred from France.

Stalin's patience snapped. How long will this mess continue? Double provocateurs are sitting on the reconnaissance channels, performing the tasks of British intelligence. You do not need to be seven spans in the forehead to understand: setting Hitler on the Soviet Union is the only chance for the British to thwart the German invasion of their islands and avoid the long-deserved historical finale.

The leader summons Golikov and Fitin to him and, in the presence of Malenkov, demands "to purge from the agents of provocateurs who want to set Hitler against us." Both heads of intelligence departments assure the leader that all this is empty talk - the Germans do not even have any plan of war against us yet. And as you know, a German without a plan is like a turtle without a shell. A German cannot live without a plan. The German is not capable of improvisation. And in secret, like us, the Germans are completely incapable of keeping their plans. All their plans are known to us: from the invasion of England to the capture of Gibraltar and the invasion of Greece. The directive for Operation Marita (the invasion of Greece) has not yet been signed by Hitler, but we already know it.

- Well, - the leader softens, - but remove the provocateurs. It becomes hard to work - they confuse.

Returning from Stalin, Golikov gathered the heads of all six operations departments of the GRU and gave them something like a lecture on the international position of the Soviet Union. He began with a non-aggression pact and a friendship treaty between the USSR and Germany, calling them

"a product of the dialectical genius of Comrade Stalin." The prospect of a German attack on the USSR, he said, is not even illusory, but simply fantastic.

- They are not crazy - they know the approximate balance of power. England, like France, will soon be defeated and her empire divided between Germany and Japan. The United States - the heart of classical capitalism - in order to save the British Empire and the entire world capitalist system from complete collapse, will also inevitably enter the war against Germany. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union will wait patiently until the moment comes to play its future role. As soon as the capitalists bleed and exhaust each other, we will free the whole world.

The head of the GRU uttered the last phrase, looking at the head of the information department, lieutenant colonel Vasily Novobranets, as if emphasizing that this installation concerns personally his.

Despite his youth, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie has already managed to graduate from two academies - them. Frunze and the General Staff and served as deputy chief of the operations department of the headquarters of the front group in the Far East, commanded by Army Commander 1st Rank Stern, who was then recertified as a colonel general. After the battles at Khalkhin Gol, General Stern, taking with him the members of the Military Council Biryukov and Novobranets, came to Moscow to report to Stalin on the plan for the deployment of troops on the Far Eastern Front for 1940.

At meetings, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie was, of course, a "little man" - as needed, he handed over to Stern the necessary documents and operational developments. But did not go unnoticed. The then head of the GRU, Ivan Proskurov, drew attention to the analytical abilities of the young officer, who suggested that the lieutenant colonel go to work in intelligence. The recruit flatly refused: firstly, he had already grown to the Far East, where he was promised an apartment in the near future, and secondly, he knew very well how dangerous work in intelligence was, where seven heads of the GRU were shot in succession with all the heads of departments. However, the principle of voluntariness ceased to operate not only in aviation, but also in intelligence. Despite the refusal, the Recruit was called into the ranks of the NPO and ordered to report to the GRU for further service, where he was appointed deputy head of the information department for the East. While Rookie was getting used to a new place, the head of the GRU, General Proskurov, was arrested, and the head of the information department, Colonel Pugachev, was removed from his post, and General Dubinin took his place. Filipp Golikov became the head of the GRU instead of the arrested and later shot Proskurov, the fourth head in two years. To take up a post in which eight of your predecessors were shot in succession, one must, no doubt, have great courage. But even great courage does not add knowledge, so necessary in the web of global disinformation.

Being the only one in the Main Intelligence Directorate initiated into the operation "Thunderstorm" and knowing Stalin's attitude to this operation, as well as the fact that the whole plan of the operation is based on the invasion of German troops into England, Golikov, perhaps without realizing his actions, but simply wanting to survive, he began to adjust the intelligence of his service to this fairly simple scheme. They say that he himself was a big fan of the Thunderstorm and was most afraid that Stalin at the last moment would not have the determination to carry out this operation.

Therefore, with his subordinates, who were not privy to global plans, but honestly did their job in the directions indicated by him, Golikov had to explain himself with hints and smiles, carefully letting them know what exactly the big bosses wanted to hear from intelligence. Professional and highly experienced intelligence officers who headed the GRU departments turned out to be confused even by setting the tasks that he set before

them the head of the GRU. With a constant smile on his face, Golikov told his subordinates: "Do this or vice versa," and no one understood how to do it right. But this made it possible for Golikov to cut off too zealous subordinates with the words: "I didn't give you such instructions!" or "You misunderstood me." Most of all, he was afraid that intelligence reports and orientations would not coincide with Stalin's opinion.

As a result of such leadership, the head of the information department, Major General Dubinin, simply went crazy and ended up in a psychiatric hospital, and Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets was appointed head of the department.

Not knowing about the global plans of Comrade Stalin, the Rookie, unlike the leader of all peoples and his immediate superior, did not at all believe in the possibility Hitler to cross the English Channel and invade England. Back in the days of Ivan Proskurov, through rather simple calculations, the analysts of the department found out that the Sea Lion operation could not be carried out for a very simple reason: the Germans did not have either airborne transport or airborne landing craft to deliver the minimum necessary to the coast of southern England forces in 60 divisions. They do not even have the means to transfer 30 divisions in the first echelon to seize bridgeheads. The scouts calculated the number of boats needed for this and the number available, including barges from all German and French rivers. General Proskurov tried to report all these calculations to Stalin, for which he paid with his head.

However, the sudden disappearance of General Proskurov did not at all convince Lieutenant Colonel Rookie that the Germans were capable of crossing the English Channel. What he said to the successor of General Philip Golikov. Golikov, as always, smiled his enigmatic smile:

Why are you so worried about them? They will not succeed in landing - it is worse for them. Will try again!

"They are not going to land, comrade general," the lieutenant colonel insisted, "the point is not even whether they can or not, but that they are simply not going to do this, misleading everyone, but first of all us.

– Why would they? Golikov asked.

"In order to attack us under the cover of this misinformation," the Recruit said with conviction.

Golikov laughed:

Let them attack. Someone upstairs is just waiting for them to attack us. How will they attack us, having 93 divisions on the canal? Are they crazy?

The recruit was silent.

"You yourself studied the Hamelin documents," Golikov continued, "and you know how much stronger we are than them. How can they attack us?

The easy victory of the Wehrmacht on the Western Front over the combined Franco-British forces, as you know, shocked many, and most of all Comrade Stalin himself. The leader ordered intelligence to unravel the "secret" of German successes and to reveal that the Germans had come up with something new in the art of war. Soon, an extremely valuable document fell into the hands of intelligence - "The official report of the French General Staff on the Franco-German war of 1939-40." This report was personally handed over to the Soviet military attache in Vichy by the Chief of the General Staff of the French Army, General Gamelin, allegedly saying: "Take, study and



see that the same fate does not befall you."

Gamelin's report really turned out to be very valuable, which Lieutenant Colonel Rookie understood after a cursory review. It showed the entire German army down to each division and individual unit (more than a hundred divisions) - their composition, weapons, numbering and grouping. The diagrams depicted the entire course of hostilities from the first to the last day of the war. In the words of the Rookie himself, he and his subordinates pounced on this report like they were hungry for food. All of these divisions were registered - this made it possible to track both movements and transfers. The recruit began to study the balance of forces during the battle along the lines and look for what the Germans came up with new in operational art, where and what is the secret of their lightning victory? Perhaps new was the appearance of tank groups, which in terms of numbers corresponded to about two of our tank divisions or a mechanized corps. And, of course, the clear interaction of tanks, artillery, aviation and infantry was striking. But this interaction is achieved and polished in the exercises, and is not created by itself.

The report was sent to the Chief of the General Staff with recommendations to create large artillery anti-tank formations, entire divisions of anti-aircraft artillery, engineering brigades and corps" [48]. Then any blow of the enemy will immediately choke in our defenses and the Germans will never be able to pass through our territory, as they did through the French.

- You correctly showed in that report, - explained Golikov, - that the Germans did not come up with anything new. We knew this tactic when there was no Wehrmacht in the world. But with the recommendations too smart. With all developments, the main thing to remember is that the war will be fought on foreign territory, with little bloodshed. And now, when they have the entire army on the canal, we have nothing to worry about at all.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie and this time did not agree with the authorities. According to him, the Germans have already deployed at least 110 divisions on the border with the USSR.

## Chapter 10

On December 5, Brauchitsch and Halder were finally summoned to the Reich Chancellery.

The Fuhrer was in a somewhat excited state, which the generals noticed immediately when they were shown into the office. Barely nodding to those who entered, Hitler continued to pace from corner to corner, nervously rubbing his hands and from time to time stamping his right foot, as if in time with some music that sounded in his head.

The SS men knew their Fuhrer well, and therefore they learned not only to reassure him, but also to convince him. And when that failed, they simply acted on his behalf. The Führer caught them on this several times, arranging grandiose reprimands and tantrums for the leaders of his "black guard", but he was always able to calm him down and convince him that everything was done, even without his knowledge, but well" [49].

Halder also knew Hitler well and, by his appearance, began to fear that this long-awaited conference would turn into a monologue of the Fuhrer, turning into hysteria. In this case, it will not be possible to report anything plainly, but you will only have to listen to the Fuhrer's abstract rantings, say, about his role in the plans of Divine Providence.

However, the Chief of the General Staff was mistaken. The Fuhrer suddenly interrupted his walk

in the Cabinet and announced to the generals that the capture of Gibraltar must be carried out no later than January 14, 1941. This is his firm decision, which is not subject to discussion. The invasion of Greece is also a settled matter, but he will make the final decision himself. Preparations should be carried out in such a way as to start the invasion by the beginning of March. He wants to hear from the gentlemen of the generals how they think about the conduct of Operation Felix and how far the preparations have advanced.

Laying out his documents on the table, Halder reported that the operation was to begin with a massive air raid on Gibraltar, which would be accompanied by a powerful artillery strike. The time between an air raid and an artillery strike must be reduced to a minimum. It is supposed to destroy every square meter of English territory with artillery fire. Therefore, a large amount of ammunition for siege mortars is needed. In other words, it is necessary to provide heavy artillery with the possibility of unlimited consumption of ammunition. This means about 20-30 ammo trains. In addition to ammunition, it is necessary to deliver the mortars themselves to Spain. That's 10 more tiers.

In Halder's report, which he reads in an even dry voice, the question comes through: where to get all these echelons, soldiers and military equipment. And does the Fuhrer really think that such large-scale preparations will not go unnoticed by the enemy?

Halder reports on the catastrophic situation of the Italians in Albania and looks questioningly at Hitler.

Instead of answering, Hitler, leaning his hands on a table on which a map of the western Mediterranean is spread, announces with some solemnity in his voice:

- Lord! I decided to finally occupy France. I mean the southern part of this country. Under the armistice agreement concluded in the summer, France undertook, if not to help us in our military efforts, then not to interfere with them. However, this country is behaving at the present time as if it did not attack Germany and did not suffer a completely just retribution. Therefore, I approved the plan for Operation Attila, developed on my orders in the OKW. General Jodl will now read to you the main provisions of the new directive, which will be sent to headquarters in the near future.

The chief of staff of the OKW, which by this time had already become Hitler's personal headquarters, General Jodl, in his crackling voice, read out the draft of Operation Attila:

The Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces, General Brauchitsch, who has remained silent until now, asked for clarification when it is planned to carry out Operation Attila: before or after the capture of Gibraltar? If before, then it should start now. If after, then there is a risk of disrupting all transportation for the alleged Spanish grouping of the Wehrmacht, since in their operational rear, albeit short, but hostilities will begin, as a result of which, which is very likely, all the ports of southern France will fail.

Hitler explodes.

- Brauchitsch! he yells. - You will carry out any operation no earlier and no later than I order you to do it! Do you understand me?

"Yes, my Fuhrer," the Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces calmly answers, "however, it seems to me very reckless at the present time to divert forces and attention from the eastern direction. In particular, from the General Government and East Prussia, from where, as the Führer knows, I returned from an inspection trip the day before yesterday.

Hitler sinks back into his chair and looks at the generals with an inquiring look.

Halder, taking over from Brauchitsch, continues:

- My Fuhrer, the plan of operation "Otto", which was developed by the General Staff on your orders and under my leadership, is already ready. We would like this plan to be framed in the framework of a specific directive, indicating the timing and full schedule of the operation. I would not like the question to be postponed indefinitely again, as it has already happened twice.

The General pauses, waiting for another outburst of Hitler's irritation. But Hitler is silent, suddenly limp in his chair, listening to the Chief of the General Staff with half-closed eyes.

An operational map of the General Staff is spread out on a special table-tablet, dotted with red, blue and green symbols, icons and numbers. All those present, getting up from their seats, approach the table.

How many divisions do we have in the east? Hitler asks, rubbing his chin with his hand.

"One hundred and ten divisions, of which eleven are tank divisions," reports the chief of the General Staff.

It is clear to everyone that this is not enough not only for an attack, but also for an effective defense. Therefore, the main task at the present time is the transfer of troops to the east with even greater intensity. These troops must be deployed along the entire border line with the USSR up to and including the Black Sea. Starting a war even with strong blows from the territory of Poland and East Prussia is madness. The Russians will respond with a powerful counterattack towards Romania and the Protectorate, where our flanks are hanging in the air.

The main thing is to forestall the Russians in delivering the first blow. If this can be done, then there will be an excellent opportunity for a quick encirclement of the main forces of the Red Army, concentrated on ledge balconies. The configuration of the theater of operations, which expands to the east like a funnel, dictates the need for a decisive defeat of the Russian forces to the Kiev-Minsk-Chudskoye Lake line, especially since the main forces of the Red Army are concentrated to the west of this line. At the same time, the task is not to push the Soviet troops behind this line, but to destroy them, since on the other side of the Dnieper-Dvina line one space threatens to swallow up any operation carried out on a broad front. The result of this operation is the capture of the original base, a kind of land bridge, which defined the Smolensk region for the subsequent attack on the capital of the Bolsheviks - Moscow, in order to occupy it before the autumn thaw.

Thus, the main blow is delivered to the north of the Pripjat region due to favorable road conditions and the possibility of a direct offensive into the central regions of Russia and the Baltic. The second strike comes from Romania and Southern Poland (or only from Southern Poland, if that is the case). The campaign must be won by a single echelon of troops of significant reserves. The Eastern Army will have 3 million men, 600,000 horses and 600,000 motor vehicles.

The Chief of the General Staff draws the attention of those present to the fact that the reserve of personnel for the army has 400 thousand people and can only cover losses until the autumn of 1941. This must be kept in mind when planning the operation. Any disruption to the schedule will lead to the need for a new mobilization, and this threatens to expose the industry.

Everyone is silent and looks at Hitler, waiting for his reaction.

Hitler stands with his hands on a table with a strategic map, one glance at which is enough to understand how unequal the forces are.

"So," the Fuhrer says, addressing no one in particular, "each German soldier must kill or capture ten Russians. Only a German is capable of such a feat.

Everyone tensed, waiting for the Fuhrer to start again one of his favorite lectures on the ancient heroics of the Germans, who inherited the immortal spirit of Hellas and Rome, when one centurius killed 100 barbarians.

But Hitler suddenly straightened up and said that he approved in principle the plan proposed by Halder, but was surprised why the plan ignored his verbal instructions that the main goal of the operation should not be Moscow, but Ukraine and the Baltic states. One should not blindly imitate Napoleon and consider Moscow as the main goal. Moreover, history has shown that the capture of Moscow brought Napoleon absolutely nothing good.

For us, the capture of the capital is not so important in comparison with the achievement of other goals.

Brauchitsch dared to object that, apart from the moral significance of the capture of Moscow, the capital of the USSR is the largest communications center in all of Russia and the center of the military industry.

Hitler silenced the commander-in-chief of the ground forces with a look and said: "Only completely ossified brains, brought up on the ideas of past centuries, think of nothing else but the capture of the enemy's capital."

No one objected, because everyone present understood that so far this was not even planning actions, but simple conversations on the old German topic - how to break out of the encirclement that Germany fell into in any European conflict, starting from the time of Frederick the Great.

The resolution of the meeting read: "The tasks of the ground forces are to be defined as follows: with the support of aviation, at any cost, destroy the best personnel of the Russian army, in order to thereby disrupt the planned and full-fledged use of large Russian forces."

Further, the Fuhrer's dissenting opinion was included in the Otto plan:

"If the OKH (High Command of the Ground Forces) considers the direction of the main attack on Moscow to be the criterion for the success of the entire campaign, since the main enemy forces deployed in this direction will be defeated here, then the Fuhrer considers and demands that the central army group, after the destruction of Soviet troops in Belarus, first would turn part of its strong mobile groups to the north and south to capture the Baltic states and Ukraine, and then would resume the offensive against Moscow.

In simpler terms, this meant that the General Staff officers had to redo the plan.

Hitler closed the meeting conciliatory, rather vaguely declaring that "we must solve all our European continental problems in 1941 in order to be able to take action against the United States in 1942."

And invited gentlemen generals to dine.

The Fuhrer was a vegetarian, and therefore no one was particularly eager to get to him for lunch. In addition, at the table one had to listen to all sorts of abstract Hitler monologues, which created a bitter sense of wasted time in the busy generals.

But, of course, it was absolutely impossible to refuse the invitation.

Halder, following to the dining room next to Hitler, reported to the Fuhrer in an undertone that, according to intelligence, the commanders of districts and armies were coming to Moscow to hold the largest secret conference and strategic games in order to finally polish the invasion of Europe. The general hinted that time should not be wasted on disagreements about the details of the plan, but rather it should be formalized as a directive and begin to be implemented. The Fuhrer smiled sadly and nodded his head, but Halder realized that Hitler's head was occupied with something else, and fell silent.

The American heavy cruiser Tuscaloosa easily and gracefully cut through the emerald waters of the Caribbean Sea with its swift bow. The white foam of the bow breaker was carried along the sides of the cruiser and carried astern into the seething stream from the working propellers. A middle-aged man in a white panama and a wrinkled home jacket sat in a wicker chair on the poop of a cruiser, holding a spinning rod in his hands. Behind the chair stood several people in uniform and civilian clothes, demonstrating with their whole appearance that they were not interested in anything but fishing.

On the mast of the cruiser, next to a small state flag, which also plays the role of a naval one, a huge blue banner fluttered in the warm south wind with outstretched gilded wings of a white-tailed eagle, whose chest was decorated with the heraldic shield-standard of the President of the United States of America.

Everyone on the ship, from the commander to the civilian Filipino bartender, was filled with the awareness of the opportunity to join history.

The president's sea voyage on the Tuscaloosa was a big surprise to everyone, including the State Department. Foreign diplomats buzzed like disturbed wasps, trying to figure out what caused such events that were not provided for by any protocol. The British embassy was especially alarmed, believing that after his victory in the elections, Roosevelt lost interest in the European war and began to carelessly spend precious time. Officially, the White House announced that the purpose of the President's trip is to inspect some sites for the construction of new bases recently acquired in the West Indies. This looked more plausible, since among the persons accompanying Roosevelt there was not a single person capable of giving him advice or even information on the most serious problems of Europe and the Far East. The only exception, but a common one during the long years of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, was Harry Hopkins - his old friend, who did not hold any official posts, was at times elevated to the rank of adviser, but played the role of a whole conclave of gray cardinals under the president. The version that the president went fishing seemed very plausible. So plausible that Ernest Hemingway gave the cruiser a radiogram, indicating the presence of a large number of large fish in the Mona Strait between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, advising the president to use "a feathered hook with a piece of lard impaled on it."

Correspondents officially accredited to the Tuscaloosa also confirmed the fact that the president had simply allowed himself to become slightly demagnetized. A large supply of Cuban cigars was purchased from Guantanamo Bay. On the islands of Jamaica, St. Lucia, and Antigua, the president gave breakfast to British colonial officials and their wives. When he arrived at the island of Elutiera, he received on board the Governor-General of the Bahamas, the Duke of Windsor, the former King Edward VIII, whom the British government sent to the Bahamas, as "Napoleon to the island of St. Helena." The former king's sympathies for Germany in general and for Hitler in particular were well known. It was even suspected that the duke was simply working for German intelligence. What was less known was the use of the former king "in the dark" by Soviet intelligence through the curator of his art gallery, Wools. Nevertheless, Roosevelt accepted the former king with

with complete cordiality and, if he asked anything during a conversation at breakfast, it was the fate of the stamp collection that belonged to the duke's father, King George V. Roosevelt was an avid philatelist.

The President clearly enjoyed being aboard the heavy cruiser. He noted several times that if there were more space on the ship to accommodate the entire bureaucratic apparatus of state administration, he would not hesitate to change the White House to the aft admiral's salon and even achieve the adoption of the corresponding law by Congress.

During the day, Roosevelt talked with Hopkins, listened to the advice of his Dr. McIntyre, went fishing, or simply relaxed, sitting in a chair on the poop. Evenings on the ship were spent either playing poker or watching movies. The film "Tin-Pan-Alley" with Alice Fong and Betty Grable enjoyed particular success.

Correspondents, however, did not report that from time to time (quite often) Navy seaplanes landed aboard the Tuscaloosa, delivering mail from the White House, including a huge amount of government papers sent to the president. In one of these packages, on the morning of December 9, a large letter from Churchill was delivered to Roosevelt. After reviewing the letter, the president gave it to Hopkins to read. Hopkins drew attention to the fact that the Prime Minister of England painted a very detailed and frank picture of the situation from the North Sea to Gibraltar and from the Suez Canal to Singapore, referring to the critical state of British finances, production and shipping, imploring America to provide immediate assistance. Hopkins was particularly impressed by the end of the letter, with an expression of confidence that "the American people will support the cause of England and meet her urgent needs," without any suggestions as to how President Roosevelt could do all this with the permission of Congress and the people of the United States. Hopkins even had a desire to get acquainted with Churchill in order to establish "how much pomposity and how much severe realism was in him."

In the evening of the same day, the first message came on board the Tuscaloosa that the British had launched an offensive against the Italian troops in Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, i.e. in all areas of the revived Mussolini of the Roman Empire. This caused some surprise, since everyone expected the opposite - an Italian offensive to push the British beyond the Suez Canal. Knowing that the British had about three times fewer forces in the area than the Italians, Roosevelt requested confirmation of the information.

The flying boat "Catalina", famously landing at the very side of the "Tuscaloosa", quickly delivered the necessary documents. Navy Secretary Knox and US Navy Commander Admiral Stark followed.

The army of Marshal Graziani, after the first blow of the British, turned into a stampede, leaving military equipment, warehouses with ammunition and fuel. The British are rapidly moving towards the Libyan border, at the same time clearing the territory of Ethiopia and Sudan from the Italian garrisons.

Standing behind the president's chair on the poop of the cruiser, they reported to him their vision of the situation, while the president himself, it would seem, was completely absorbed in the process of fishing. Contrary to Hemingway's assertions, the fish were biting badly. The biggest catch was a twenty-pound grouper, and even then caught by Hopkins. But Roosevelt did not lose hope of overtaking his friend.

The kind face of the president, his democratic convictions and confidence that the social system existing in the United States, which guarantees its citizens all the freedoms and opportunities conceivable in human society, is the best of everything that mankind has come up with over 50 centuries of its historical existence, made it in the eyes of

European dictators as an incompetent statesman, stuck in the impenetrable swamp of glasnost, democratic laws and parliamentary procedures.

He often said that European dictators Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini were "possessed by the devil" in their obsession with world hegemony. He spoke what the whole world saw and knew well enough. Back in 1939, he predicted the inevitability of a fight between Hitler and Stalin as the inevitability of a change in the time of day, day and night. But the words of the American president were almost never heard in Moscow and Berlin, since in both centers of world totalitarianism he was never taken seriously from the only military-aggressive point of view understandable in these centers. Analytical reports of intelligence officers painted the image of a terminally ill old man with legs weary, ambitious enough, hardworking enough, no doubt smart and capable of leading, a man who was put on by the Jews (view from Berlin) and the exploiting classes (view from Moscow) in order to make a profit and excess profits from the money and goods put into circulation.

True, both in Moscow, and in Berlin, and in Tokyo, they understood that potentially the industry of the United States could forge mountains of weapons, but with one indispensable condition - if there is a buyer for it.

The US arms program, which has become an easy prey for almost all intelligence agencies in the world, was not taken seriously, firstly, because of too astronomical figures that looked like bad advertising for a provincial bank and, secondly: who will fight with these weapons?

Are these sleek young men in bowlers and bow ties playing tennis and swimming in pools? It was hard to believe that these young people were able to sit in a trench for at least half an hour and not start a rally about the violation of their civil rights.

Everyone wanted to see how America would react if it were attacked, like Poland or Finland, or at least became the object of daily merciless bombing, like England? The answers were different, but it must be said that analysts, to give them their due, have always agreed that no one is able to attack America at the present time and with the current state of military equipment. Although the distant American garrisons in the Philippines, Wake, the Aleutian and Hawaiian Islands can, in principle, be attacked, and even delivered a crushing blow to these objects, which, of course, is not capable of putting an end to the United States, but is quite capable of putting them in their place for a long time discourage the desire to deal with world problems [50].

Therefore, the presidents of the United States were not particularly studied, especially Franklin Roosevelt, since he was a cripple, chained to an armchair, and everyone every day expected that he himself would be removed from office for health reasons. "It's just amazing," Hitler once said, after watching another American Western, "how such a large and dynamic country tolerates a cripple at the head of itself, who cannot even go to the closet himself?"

Unlike his opponents, Roosevelt was the only politician in those years who saw things in all their reality and had the means to wage precisely that very global war, the rules of which were dictated by the conditions of the industrial age. As the only sober politician, he already saw that, as a result of the ever-brightening flame of the world conflict, world domination, in the name of which Stalin and Hitler are ready to sacrifice millions of lives of their subjects and the future of their countries, will be presented to the United States like an orange on a silver tray. And already divided into slices, with the skin removed, lying next to it. No matter how you remove the skin from an orange, it somehow takes on a shape similar to the configuration of the USSR in geographical atlases. The slices can be eaten immediately, and the skin is slightly dried, then

crank through a meat grinder and add to the overall pie for smell. Of course, in the next 10-15 years we will have to do a lot of work, and then all processes will begin to develop automatically.

First of all, it is necessary to thwart all attempts to conclude peace between England and Germany. England must have as many weapons as she wants. She can only get this weapon from us. But what if she no longer has money?

One way or another, but this issue must be resolved in the very near future.

The second is the inevitable conflict between the current robber friends Stalin and Hitler. One look at the map is enough to see the most ideal version of this conflict. Hitler starts and reaches about the Volga, where he runs out of breath and is driven back. Well, if this process lasted two or three years. This will force him to withdraw his army from Europe and dissolve it in the vast fields and forests of Russia. At the same time, measures must be taken so that the Soviet Union does not collapse and fall apart, even if Stalin had to move his capital to Magadan. It is even hard to believe in the possibility of such an ideal option. Intelligence reports tell a completely different story. Stalin has such a superiority in all indicators of the armed forces that Hitler just needs to go crazy to dare to throw himself at this red monster of iron and steel. So the key to the problem is to make Hitler completely crazy, like a rat in the Murray maze, throwing himself at the electrodes under the current only because there is nowhere else, but he wants to eat. And behind the electrodes, she sees cheese as the only way to escape starvation in a mousetrap maze. Here, too, there are several real moves to implement the plan. But Stalin! If he starts, the situation will become unpredictable. And everything speaks for the fact that he intends to do just that, waiting for the moment when Hitler and the British grapple in some long and bloody battles. It is unlikely that now, after the British offensive in North Africa, Hitler will send a large force there, if he sends any at all.

Most likely, he will climb into Greece, but everything should end there quickly enough. He can put a few mines on the road, say, in Yugoslavia, but it remains to be seen whether they will work. Stalin is waiting for his landing in England. It's clear as God's day. But it is also clear that there will be no landing. Glory to the Creator that Stalin does not understand this, and therefore, we must make every effort so that he does not understand this. In other words, it is necessary to find a way to keep him on the chain for the time being. And to begin with, lift the "moral embargo" on trade from Russia, introduced mainly in order to slightly moderate the Stalinist appetite that was so played out last year. All this is very risky, but it can be calculated if our intelligence operates in sync with the British ... and German.

If this plan succeeds, Tokyo could be put in its place in passing, turning Japan from a weapon-clattering rival into a junior trading partner.

But the most difficult is the other. This whole plan cannot be carried out without our direct intervention in events. How to raise America to participate in a global war? How to send millions of Americans dressed in unusual military uniforms to all corners of the earth to secure and consolidate our hegemony in the new post-war world? Without solving this most difficult task, all Other Plans will become purely academic and practically meaningless ...

The spinning reel began to spin rapidly. Roosevelt tried to stop the reel, but the fish was too big to tear it at itself.



Strong sailor's hands took the spinning from the President's hands.

Roosevelt leaned back wearily in his chair and turned to the Commander-in-Chief of the US Navy, Admiral Stark, standing behind him:

- Are you saying, Harold, that the Pacific Fleet has completed the entire cycle of summer-autumn exercises?

"Yes, sir," the admiral reported.

"Let the fleet stay in Hawaii, at Pearl Harbor. - Roosevelt ordered, reminding the admiral that he, the president, is, among other things, the supreme commander of the US armed forces

- At Pearl Harbor? the admiral was surprised. - For how long?

"Until further notice," the president explained.

"But, Mr. President," the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy tried to object, "people need rest, and ships need repairs, some even major ones. All this is possible, as you well know, only at our West Coast bases. The base at Pearl Harbor is completely unsuitable for this ...

"Give orders to Admiral Richardson at once," the President interrupted Stark, "the fleet remains in Hawaii until further notice. People should understand that military service sometimes brings some discomfort in private life. The Pacific Fleet must constantly play the role of a pistol pointed at the temple of Tokyo, so that they would beware of engaging in open robbery. The robber must always have a police officer in front of him. Give the order to Richardson directly through the Tuscaloosa radio station ...

"Frank," the President turned to the Minister of Marine standing on the other side, "does your California ranch have a garden hose?"

Colonel Knox even choked with surprise.

- Yes, sir. Of course, sir.

"What would you do if your neighbor's house caught fire and he didn't have a garden hose?" Would you give him yours? the president kept asking.

"Yes, I suppose so, sir," the Minister of Marine replied, embarrassed, not understanding what the president was driving at.

"Why would you do that, Mr. Knox, instead of telling your neighbor that you should have gone ahead and bought your own hose?"

"In California," Knox explained, "fires are a real disaster. If someone starts and does not put out in time, then everyone will burn. So I better give him my hose before my house burns down too.

"That's the crux of the problem," Roosevelt agreed, addressing no one in particular...

Meanwhile, the sailors dragged a medium-sized shark onto the deck, which desperately wriggled under the blows of the hooks, caught on a piece of fat ...

On December 16, Roosevelt returned to Washington, tanned, full of energy and cheerful. The next day, he called a press conference at which he openly stated: "In

There is absolutely no doubt in the minds of the vast majority of Americans that the best immediate defense of the United States is the success of Britain in its self-defence. The President went on to point out that England should have been lent money to buy American war materials so that the gallant British could continue the fight.

"I want to explain this with a clear example," said Roosevelt, "suppose that there was a fire in a neighbor's house, and I have a garden hose ..."

It made the strongest impression: give me the hose before your house catches fire. No one saw anything dangerous or even radical in the president's proposal to lend the British an American garden hose for their heroic and (as it seemed) unequal struggle against Hitler. It is not known whether anyone expected to get this hose back, but Roosevelt's brilliant performance ensured the passage of the already prepared Lend-Lease law through Congress - the strangest and most unusual law passed in a country that officially declared itself neutral [51].

On December 18, Halder and Brauchitsch submitted to Hitler for approval what the generals believed was the final plan of military action against the Soviet Union. The Fuhrer looked gloomy and looked at his loyal generals without any enthusiasm. There were reasons for this, and the generals were well aware of them. Starting on December 8, bad news, growing into very bad and just terrible, poured in an endless stream.

It started with little things. On December 8, a message came that near Cuba, British ships had intercepted the German blockade breaker *Idarwald* with a cargo of rubber and nickel. The valiant team of the breakout immediately opened the kingstones, set fire to the ship and tried to escape in boats. The British landed the prize party on the *Idarwald*, put out the fire, but they could not figure out the kingstone system, and the ship sank. The team was taken prisoner. One ship more, one less, when the entire merchant fleet is idle, of course, it does not matter. But it's disgusting. The British staged such a propaganda fuss about this, as if they were not piracy in international waters, but at least won the war.

The next day, December 9, the message finally came that new fierce fighting had begun in North Africa. Hitler's spirits lifted as he decided that the long-promised offensive of the huge Italian army against the British had begun. However, by the end of the day it turned out that not the Italians, but the British, went on the offensive. This was unbelievable, given the balance of power. But the next day, confirmation of this incredible fact was received. After a night attack on Italian airfields on the Libyan border, the British attacked the positions of the Italians, who immediately fled. And those who did not have time to escape began to surrender in masses. Hitler was told that the Duce, in a conversation with his son-in-law, Count Ciano, said: "I still must admit that the Italians of 1914 were better than these. This is a race of mediocrities. It's not very flattering to the regime, but that's the way it is."

"What a clever man," Hitler hissed, having read this statement by the Duce. Already on the third day of the British offensive in Berlin, they sorted out the situation. All military operations in the desert were reduced to the fact that the 7th British Panzer Division, having overtaken its infantry, rushed after the fleeing Italians and captured whom it overtook. Roughly the same thing happened in Albania, and had there been a desert, as in Africa, and not an almost impenetrable mountainous area, the Greeks might have already entered Rome.

Every morning Hitler woke up with a terrible premonition that the British had landed in

Italy or Sicily, causing a nationwide uprising of Italians who did not want to fight against the Duce. He anxiously awaited the morning report on the situation. In the wake of this nightmare, otherwise it was impossible to name the prospect of withdrawing from the war of his only ally, who was on the verge of disaster, on December 10, Hitler signed a directive on the conduct of Operation Attila, and on December 13, on the conduct of Operation Marita. The fact is that Germany did not have a common border with Italy and would not be able to help the Duce if the British landed on Italian territory. Operation Attila, as you know, provided for the occupation of southern France with access to the Spanish and Italian borders. It was conceived in connection with the capture of Gibraltar, but by this time it was no longer up to Gibraltar. Firstly, it has already become quite clear that it will not be possible to agree with Franco. Even an old friend of the Generalissimo could not, the head of German military intelligence, Admiral Canaris, who was specially sent to Madrid to try to convince the stubborn Spaniard in intimate conversations [52]. He did not want to get involved in any war. Now Operation Attila has taken on a new meaning: to quickly come to the aid of the Duce if the British kick Italy out of the war, and to punish Franco by occupying Spain, if the opportunity arises, by shooting him himself as a traitor.

There was still an opportunity to strike the British through Greece, but everyone understood that even if this could be done, the effect would not be the same. The British are evacuating their troops by sea, and again no one will be able to prevent this. A crushing blow will not work.

Things in Romania were even worse. Slashed by the territorial claims of its neighbors, Stalinist appetites and German-Hungarian intrigues, Romania seethed and threatened to collapse altogether as a state. British and Soviet intelligence on its territory were engaged in provocations, each in its own way. The British have always been masters of organizing social unrest that escalates into massacres. And in vain did many people think that they succeeded only in wild Asian or African countries. The technique worked wherever there was a political crisis. Under the guise, the British hoped to either drag the Romanians to their side, or completely drown this country in chaos.

Soviet intelligence, believing that the British in this case bring an objective benefit, was still working in line with the instructions for the upcoming division of Romania, although it no longer clearly understood with whom it would have to be (if necessary) divided? There is no one to share, you have to take everything yourself. As a result, an open war was already flaring up in Romania between Antonescu and the Iron Guard, fanned on the one hand by the British, on the other hand by Stalin's intelligence with the help of local communists.

Hitler was shown a map: the distance between the Soviet troops deployed on the Romanian border and the Ploiesti basin was less than 100 kilometers. One short dagger blow, Halder explained, and all the military equipment of the Wehrmacht turns into a pile of dead iron. If Hitler is worried about the fact that the British can reach the precious oil fields with their aircraft from Greece, then the Stalinist armies can simply capture these fields in one night transition, and then announce to the whole world that Moscow did not pursue any other goals than the reunification of one some fraternal people with another fraternal people, exhausted in an unequal class struggle. Hitler silently looked at the red line of deployment of Soviet troops on the Romanian border outlined by the General Staff officers and unexpectedly asked his chief of the General Staff: "You are constantly pushing me towards the Balkans, Halder. Do you think that this war can be won in the Balkans?"

"My Fuhrer," the general replied, tapping his pointer on his palm, "the war in the Balkans, of course, cannot be won. But you can lose. That's the crux of the whole problem."

There was only one way out: to immediately occupy Romania under any pretext. Hitler summoned Antonescu to Berlin on 22 December in order to sign a treaty for Romania's accession to the Axis powers and to obtain a legal basis for any intervention.

It was more difficult with the Finns.

The winter war with the Soviet Union literally threw Finland into the arms of Berlin, in which the Finns saw not only a guarantor of their future security, but also, to a certain extent, an instrument of possible revenge. Soviet robbery was neither forgotten nor taken for granted. The whole country was still living in the recent war, not wanting to come to terms with the loss of territories so vital to it.

Finnish intelligence was well aware of Moscow's intentions to eventually capture the rest of Finland. However, for this it was not necessary to have good intelligence. It was enough to read the newspapers. The outcome of a new war without the Mannerheim line did not cause any illusions in anyone. Therefore, the Finns, knowing about the transfer of German troops to the east and hoping that this was being done for a future attack on the USSR, decided not to try to bring the Germans to clean water anymore, but with the most innocent look to offer them to place part of their troops on Finnish territory, frankly considering the Germans fools.

The Germans did not fall for this bait, but offered the Finns the so-called "transit agreement", i.e. an agreement on the right to transfer German troops to Norway through the territory of Finland.

On December 16, the Chief of the Finnish General Staff, Heinrichs, arrived in Berlin, accompanied by his chief operative, General Talvela. Together with the Finnish military attaché in Berlin, General Horn, they went to Zossen, where they presented Halder with their intelligence documents on the concentration of Soviet troops in the Baltic states and on the border with East Prussia, as well as plans for the deployment of the Baltic Fleet. The data of the Finns basically corresponded to the data of German intelligence, but some of the quantitative indicators brought by Heinrichs caused some confusion in Halder.

The invaluable combat experience of the Finnish general in the winter war against the USSR became the subject of a lengthy lecture that Heinrichs read to the leading officers of the German General Staff.

The weakest point, according to the Chief of the Finnish General Staff, is the disgusting communication, which in itself is unreliable and completely unprotected, giving the enemy easy access to his channels. Operational codes are simple and unreliable. The Russians know all this, preferring messengers with packages. Perhaps because of this, and perhaps for a number of other reasons, the Red Army almost completely lacks interaction between various branches of the armed forces.

But the main shortcoming of the Red Army, General Heinrichs continued after a significant pause, lies elsewhere. And he asks his German colleagues to listen carefully to what he has to report to them now.

The Red Army is in dead opposition, so to speak, to the regime existing in Russia. This is clear not only from a survey of prisoners of war, the number of which, by the way, exceeded all our expectations. I will take the liberty of asserting, said Heinrichs, that if we had the opportunity to inflict a strong enough blow on the Red Army and seize the initiative in our own hands, and you will agree that if we had the appropriate forces, this could be done at least three times during campaign, the Red Army would simply have fled or surrendered.

Halder looked incredulously at his Finnish colleague.

Napoleon repeated many times that it is not enough just to kill a Russian soldier to make him fall. He still needs to be pushed.

He was talking about a Russian soldier, objected Heinrichs, and the Russian soldier is long gone. There is a Soviet Red Army soldier - a slave without any rights. Consumable cannon fodder. They started a war against us without supplying the troops even with winter uniforms.

The Russian soldier, Halder recalled, was a serf with no more rights than the present one. This soldier was thrown into the Alpine passes barefoot, without boots. And that is not less...

Then a number of issues were discussed with the Finns. In particular, about the possibilities of covert mobilization in their army, constantly emphasizing that all questions are purely academic in nature within the framework of cooperation between the general staffs.

Admiral Canaris was considered a favorite of Hitler, who promoted him to admiral and made him head of military intelligence.

No one ever analyzed the wisdom of Hitler's personnel policy and did not pay attention to the fact that in many key posts of the Third Reich there were very strange personality.

In his youth, Wilhelm Canaris, with the rank of lieutenant commander, served on the light cruiser Dresden and participated in the famous raid across the Pacific Ocean of the legendary squadron of Admiral Count Spee.

After a spectacular victory at Coronel, the squadron fell into a trap set by the British near the Falkland Islands and was destroyed. The light cruiser Dresden, thanks to its high speed, managed to temporarily break away from the English pursuit and take refuge in one of the bays of Tierra del Fuego near Cape Horn. The British quickly discovered the Dresden, and before the threat of imminent destruction, the cruiser had to be flooded, and the crew interned in Argentina. This ended the naval career of Canaris and began a new one - reconnaissance and sabotage. During the First World War, Canaris had to work in the United States under the leadership of the famous von Papen, and in Madrid, where, according to rumors, he even was the lover of the legendary Mata Hari, and in many other places where the Kaiser's intelligence made titanic efforts to save from collapse own country.

After the collapse of Kaiser Germany, having taken a sip of the democratic debauchery of the Weimar Republic, Canaris, then a captain of the 1st rank, like many disappointed officers of the Kaiser army, made contact with the Nazis, seeing in them the only force capable of pulling Germany out of the "Weimar quagmire" and once again ensure its status as a great world power. The future policy declared by Hitler seemed to be aimed precisely at this.

The fact that Canaris liked Hitler is not strange. Hitler made a very strong impression on millions of people.

Another thing is strange - that Hitler liked Canaris. The admiral's grandfather was a Greek who came to work in Germany, where he married a German woman and opened a fruit shop. The grandson inherited from his grandfather, along with a prosperous shop, curly black hair, a swarthy complexion and small stature, i.e. the very appearance that always brought the Fuhrer into a state close to rage. Canaris was said to have played a prominent role in

persuasion of Field Marshal - President Hindenburg, when the issue of appointing Hitler as Chancellor was being decided, forcing the aged warrior to overcome his contempt for a man whose military career had stopped at the badge of a corporal. Canaris was one of the first to bring his congratulations to the future Fuhrer of Germany, and when the touched Hitler asked what reward he wanted for himself, he asked to be appointed head of military intelligence. What Canaris asked Hitler seemed very modest. He even asked again: "The head of military intelligence? Of course, Herr Captain zur See." Soon Canaris was promoted to rear admiral and sat down in the Abwehr headquarters at the corner of Tirpitzufer and Bendlerstrasse, trying to cover the whole world with a web of espionage from there.

However, the admiral soon became disillusioned with Hitler even more than with democracy. All regular officers who began serving in the Kaiser's army remained monarchists at heart, which implies not only and not so much loyalty to the emperor, but following certain moral, aesthetic, caste-legal norms. In fact, the constitutional-democratic monarchy of Kaiser Wilhelm II, in which they were all brought up, did not in any way assume (even in a nightmare) the simple Hitlerite methods of solving both domestic and foreign policy tasks. In other words, the former officers of the Kaiser turned out to be completely unprepared for totalitarianism, which also differed from a rigidly authoritarian monarchy, like day from night. The most apolitical simply tried to stay away from many of Hitler's activities, which was far from always successful. But this immediately put many in opposition to the regime in the widest range: from telling jokes to open sabotage.

The "Night of the Long Knives", the Nuremberg Laws, political terror, the laws on the press and art, the fires of books and, finally, the famous "Kristallnacht" showed many military professionals the complete futility of the regime, forcing them to fight it already in the name of saving Germany.

By the end of 1939, the German military intelligence Abwehr actually turned into a center for preparing a coup d'état in Germany. Canaris was at the head of the conspiracy, and the soul of the whole thing was his first deputy - the head of the central department of military intelligence and counterintelligence, Colonel (later General) Hans Oster. It all started with a feverish search for the possibility of concluding peace with Western countries during the so-called "strange war". In parallel, desperate attempts were made to disrupt the offensive planned by Hitler on the western front. All materials and documents related to the plan of the upcoming offensive were transmitted to the enemy through established communication channels through the Vatican and Istanbul, and sometimes directly. The unequivocal response of the British that they were not going to talk about peace while Hitler was in power in Germany led to a plot to arrest or kill the Fuhrer. In the Abwehr, a special team was even formed, which, upon receiving the appropriate order, was to carry out the plan. Several major generals were involved in the conspiracy, including Brauchitsch, Halder, and the retired Colonel General Beck. The generals believed that the lightning victory in Poland had raised Hitler's authority among the troops so much that at present the conspiracy had no prospects, since it would not be supported by the army. Some major setback is needed for the plot to coincide with a sharp decline in Hitler's authority in the army and in the country. The surest way to doom any military operation to failure is to reveal the plan of this operation to the enemy, which the Canaris service began to do most of its time, more and more frankly becoming on the path of outright treason. Or, to avoid such a rough wording, becoming more and more involved in the so-called "anti-Hitler resistance movement", which, of course, did not fit in at all with the performance of military intelligence of its direct tasks.

Hans Oster personally collected and sent to London operational information regarding the Norwegian operation, and only the sluggishness of the British prevented turning this

Hitler's clumsy landing operation into the complete catastrophe of German weapons.

With no less accuracy and volume, the plan of the German offensive in the west was issued to the Allies in May 1940. In the hope of the impending defeat of the Wehrmacht in the Abwehr, a curious document was prepared with a coup d'état scenario, compiled by Canaris and Oster, which stated:

"At dawn, putschist troops surround the government quarter in Berlin and occupy the most important institutions. All leading figures of the state and the Nazi Party will be arrested and handed over for conviction to special military courts. A state of emergency is immediately proclaimed and a proclamation is published announcing that the "imperial directory" headed by Colonel General Beck has taken over the board. The next step: the dissolution of the Gestapo, the Privy Council and the Ministry of Propaganda. Then the appointment of a date for general elections and the beginning of peace negotiations with the Allied Powers. Cancel dimming. Materials exposing them should be published about the arrested Nazi leaders, and satirists and comedians should be widely used to debunk them in the eyes of the people. At first, the following military units are involved in the coup: the 9th Infantry Regiment in Potsdam, the 3rd Artillery Regiment in Frankfurt an der Oder and the 15th Tank Regiment in Zagan.

The fight against the regime, and especially if this fight takes place in wartime and the enemy of your country is inevitably chosen as an ally, always gives rise to a lot of moral problems and a bunch of the wildest guilt and inferiority complexes. Canaris understood this perfectly well, since he had to fight not so much with the regime, but with himself, trying so far only for himself to find an excuse for his own actions. Once he confessed to Oster: "If Hitler wins the war, it will mean the end of us and the end of Germany. If Hitler loses it, then this will be the end of Germany. And even if we succeed in overpowering Hitler, we will cause not only his downfall, but also ours, because no one abroad will trust us anymore.

Nevertheless, both continued their activities, trying to save the country from inevitable death, seeing the only scheme for this: the conclusion of peace with the preliminary removal of Hitler from power. However, the operational plans transmitted to the enemy were of little use. The occupation of Norway was followed by a blitzkrieg in the west, the lightning defeat of the French army and the evacuation of the British expeditionary force from the continent. The authority of Hitler was further strengthened, making the plans of the conspirators unrealizable. But they continued their work, despite the fact that several times they were on the verge of failure.

Hitler, like Stalin, had two practically autonomous intelligence and counterintelligence services. In addition to the military intelligence of Admiral Canaris, there was also a political intelligence and counterintelligence network headed by SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, a personality no less strange than Canaris.

Like Canaris, Heydrich began his career in the navy. Born in 1904, he was too young to take part in the First World War, having spent the war years in his hometown of Halle, where he graduated from the gymnasium. Heydrich came from a family of professional musicians. His Jewish great-grandfather was once the first violinist in the Viennese operetta, and Reinhard himself enthusiastically indulged in music. Many consider it strange that in 1922 Heydrich entered the navy, but it should be noted that in many countries the offspring of musical families chose a naval career for themselves. There are many such examples in the English, Russian and German fleets ...

After graduating from college, young Heydrich was promoted to lieutenant and appointed communications officer on the cruiser Berlin, one of the few large ships retained by Weimar Germany after the end of the First World War. And there are such fatal coincidences that it was at the very moment when the young lieutenant Heydrich received his first officer assignment to the cruiser Berlin that the captain of the 2nd rank Canaris took command of the ship. On one ship, fate brought together two of the most sinister and mysterious figures of the future Third Reich, who left behind such a mass of mysteries and puzzles that historians have been struggling to solve without much success for more than half a century ...

The commander of the ship quite naturally made a great impression on the young officer. His participation in the legendary campaign of the squadron of Admiral Count Spee, his romantic intelligence activities during the war years, his undoubted nobility, breadth of views and encyclopedic erudition - all this made Canaris almost an idol in the eyes of the young Heydrich. This youthful admiration for his commander was preserved by Heydrich and subsequently, preventing the all-powerful head of the Main Imperial Security Directorate (RSHA) from finally cracking down on Admiral Canaris, who embarked on a frank path of fighting the Nazi regime.

Naturally, the attitude of Canaris himself towards Heydrich was different. At the next certification of a young officer subordinate to him, Canaris noted Heydrich's undoubted abilities in the field of navigation and sports. Heydrich was really fond of the then newfangled pentathlon, showing very good results, especially in fencing.

In the evenings, Heydrich's violin often sounded in the cruiser's wardroom, knocking out tears even from experienced sailors with its sentimental melodies. According to the certification of Canaris, Heydrich was soon promoted to lieutenant, and it seemed that a career as a naval officer was opening up before him.

But something completely unexpected happened. In 1931, Oberleutnant Heydrich appeared before a court of officer honor, which sentenced him to deprivation of his officer rank and dismissal from the ranks of the navy. Whoever knows the position of a naval officer in Germany at that time will understand how terrible his fall was. The reason for such a cruel sentence was Heydrich's love affair with the young wife of one of the senior officers. The case was revealed due to the fact that a young officer, violinist and swordsman showed obvious sadistic inclinations in love, bringing the object of his love to the hospital. The fact that Heydrich was very sadistic was clear even without this story: just look at his asymmetrical face and small hands with the thin fingers of a perverted violinist ...

The forced end of Heydrich's officer career and his deep fall, paradoxically, served as the beginning of his dizzying rise. He was then 27 years old, and he was faced with the need to start life anew. Deprived of the means of subsistence, disgraced and declassed, he, quite naturally, joined his fate with other personalities like him who emerged from the bottom of the then society, thrown out by painful convulsions of social contradictions. The time was difficult, and thrown out into the street, Heydrich lived on bread and water, spinning among the dregs of society in the port cities of Germany - Hamburg, Lübeck and Kiel. It was in Kiel that the newly minted lumpen met his old friend from the gymnasium in Halle Eberstein, who led one of the SS teams used by the Nazis to disperse street rallies of their political opponents and other showdowns in the struggle for possession of the street. Eberstein invited Heydrich to join his SS team, to which Heydrich agreed without hesitation. How he at the same time (and later) managed to hide his Jewish ancestor remains a mystery. Apparently, in many institutions of the Third Reich, the principle once formulated by Hermann Goering triumphed when he declared: "In my headquarters, I myself determine who is a Jew and who is not!"



Just at this time, Heinrich Himmler was organizing the security service within the SS units, which, in principle, were supposed to find out the plans of Hitler's political opponents.

At first, the new service was conceived by Himmler as purely informational, and therefore, having learned from Eberstein that Heydrich was a former naval communications officer, Himmler, out of his own illiteracy, identified the communications service with the information service in his presentation and called Heydrich to Munich to head this service. The new service was called "Sicherheit-Dinst" or SD, and if later the SS as an organization came to be considered the elite of the Nazi Party, the SD was considered the elite of the SS.

Heydrich was at the right time in the right place, and by the end of 1931, Himmler was promoted to Sturmbannführer (major), and the following year he became a Standartenführer (colonel).

After Hitler came to power, Heydrich was subordinate to the huge apparatus of the Nazi political police, which included the SD, Gestapo, criminal police and many other services, united in the Imperial Main Security Directorate. In 1934, at the age of 30, Heydrich was already a gruppenführer, which corresponded to the rank of lieutenant general, and the services subordinate to him controlled every breath in Germany and rapidly expanded their activities beyond its borders. The famous head of German political intelligence, Walter Schellenberg, who succeeded Heydrich as head of the SD and was subordinate to him for many years, characterized Heydrich as a hidden axis around which the entire Nazi regime revolved. Heydrich rose high above his political counterparts and controlled them as much as he controlled the ramified network of intelligence and political services of the Third Reich.

Thus, Hitler's coming to power was also marked by a new meeting of old acquaintances: Canaris and Heydrich, one of whom headed military intelligence, and the second - political. Heydrich continued to treat his former commander with great respect. They maintained outwardly the most friendly relations, even with some elements of familiarity characteristic of old acquaintances. Often taking morning rides together, they exchanged information and tried to coax it out of each other.

But despite the fact that the leaders sometimes said "you" to each other, a deadly war broke out between the services, intensifying every year. Heydrich considered such a division of intelligence to be a dangerous heresy, openly and energetically seeking the subordination of the Abwehr to himself. While Canaris, hatching plans for a coup d'etat, provided for the elimination of Heydrich (and Himmler, of course) with the reassignment of the intelligence structures of the SS army, that is, to himself. After the defeat of France, the Abwehr grew very large, having 3,000 officers on staff, 13 centers in Germany, having countless branches in the occupied territories and even its own reinforced Brandenburg regiment.

In the dynamics of the flaring war, military intelligence was gaining more and more strength, becoming more powerful than Heydrich's service. But if the leadership of the Abwehr in the person of Admiral Canaris and Colonel Oster every year everything openly worked for the enemy or, to put it mildly, against the regime of their country, then Heydrich's service every year with increasing bitterness was more and more involved in the fight against the Abwehr, rightly suspecting its leadership in cases that simply could not be characterized otherwise than treason.

The SD and the Gestapo simply hung on the shoulders of military intelligence, trying to track down all its secret agents and control their every move. Heydrich managed to track down and arrest Joseph Müller, who was the liaison between the Abwehr, the Vatican and

London, and on November 9, 1939, a detachment of the SD, grossly violating the sovereignty of neutral Holland, captured on its territory agents of the British secret service Best and Stevens, who were in touch with the Abwehr. Considering that the arrest of the British coincided with the famous explosion in the Munich pub immediately after the Fuhrer's departure from there, one can imagine what a commotion began in the Abwehr. Moreover, the strictest prohibition of Heydrich to inform the Abwehr about the investigation of this case quickly became clear. Then the SD found out that someone had revealed to the British the plan for the Norwegian campaign, and then the date of the offensive on the western front. Traces clearly led to the Abwehr [53].

Hitler was furious when this was reported to him and immediately ordered both the Gestapo and the Abwehr to find the traitor. Canaris did not need to look for a traitor especially, since he was his subordinate Muller, who acted on the orders of the admiral himself. He only scolded Muller for "conspiratorial dilettantism" and promised to hush up the case.

Heydrich searched for the traitor more diligently, gradually unwinding the tangle of the most widespread betrayal known in the history of the intelligence of the world.

But there was an area in which Heydrich's service was, to put it mildly, not very competent. Military affairs in all their complexity and versatility did not lend themselves well to the analysis of the Gestapo analysts. The Imperial Headquarters of Security was crammed full of ex-policemen, legal graduates and half-educated lawyers, forensic scientists, idealistic dreamers and sadistic dreamers, chemists developing new explosives for infernal machines and poisons for mass murder, talented doctors and biologists struggling with applied and fantastic military and racial issues, just psychopaths and the public close to them. There were specialists who could identify by handwriting any radio transmission of any intelligence in the world, able to detect fingerprints where it was impossible to leave them, unravel the most complex forensic mysteries, identify a Jew by an earlobe, locate any transmitter within seconds, penetrate anywhere, kidnap someone anything and everything. In a word, carry out any order received from the leadership. But no one knew how to conduct a military-strategic analysis there: neither the former schoolteacher Himmler, nor the former naval lieutenant Heydrich, nor the former lawyer Kaltenbrunner, nor the former policeman Müller, nor the half-educated jurist Schellenberg. And none of their subordinates. Despite the fact that all the listed SS leaders had undoubted talents, none of them understood and could not understand military affairs, because military science is the most complex of sciences, requiring systematic long-term education and vast practical experience.

Therefore, if the Gestapo was able to record contacts with the enemy and intercept information sent to London, then the disinformation that the Abwehr stuffed the OKW headquarters and Hitler himself was almost impossible to expose with the available forces of Heydrich's service. And if we consider that the Chief of the General Staff, Colonel-General Franz Halder himself, was deeply involved in the Abwehr intrigues and in the end was also arrested on charges of treason, miraculously surviving, then only General Jodl, the head of the headquarters of the OKW, a very capable and educated general staff officer. At meetings, he often tried to challenge the data presented by Canaris, but the Abwehr information impressed the Fuhrer more than the "cowardly" calculations of General Jodl. As for Keitel, he, as you know, never had his own opinion, but agreed with Hitler's opinion in everything, meekly endorsing all his orders, for which he eventually paid with his head. The headquarters of the High Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW) was also an extremely strange organization, swarming with saboteurs, anti-fascists, spies and talkers; rather resembled the court of the Neapolitan king of the late 18th century, rather than that powerful military structure of the global control of gigantic armed forces, as history presents it to us [54].

After Hitler, despite all his romanticism, saw the trap into which Stalin pushed him and decided to get even with his cunning Moscow opponent, Canaris was ordered to collect all the necessary information to ensure the coming armed conflict against the USSR. As always and everywhere, the general tasks of the Abwehr were to clarify the available data on the Red Army, the economy, mobilization capabilities, the political situation of the USSR, the mood of the population, as well as to obtain new information: to study the theater of military operations, to prepare reconnaissance and sabotage measures for first operations, to provide covert preparations for the invasion, while simultaneously misinforming the enemy about the true intentions of Germany.

By this time, i.e. by the end of 1940, the Abwehr was already a powerful and widely branched organization capable of solving any intelligence tasks in almost all regions of the world. And at their side, in the territories of contact with the USSR, the service of Admiral Canaris was guided clearly and confidently.

The center for the collection and preliminary processing of all intelligence data relating to the Soviet Union was the Abwehr-1 department, headed by Colonel Pickenbrock, a friend of Oster, initiated into the plans of the conspirators. His department received intelligence data conducted by Heydrich's service, which was achieved on the direct orders of Hitler. The "competitors" took advantage of this, planting their own disinformation on the Abwehr, trying to use it as a "tagged atom" to reveal the Abwehr betrayal inside. This misinformation in the Pickenbrock department was superbly screened out and reported to Hitler with reference to the source, completely confusing the Fuhrer and substituting Himmler and Heydrich under his wrath.

In addition, the Abwehr-1 department received data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the apparatus of the Nazi Party and, of course, from military, naval and aviation intelligence. After preliminary processing, Abwehr-1 submitted all military data to the main headquarters of the branches of the armed forces and to the General Staff, where there was a special department for the study of foreign armies of the East.

The Abwehr-2 department, headed by Colonel Lahousen, was engaged in the preparation of acts of sabotage on enemy territory, and the Abwehr-3 department of Colonel Bentiveny was in charge of military counterintelligence.

All information flowed to the Central Department of Colonel Oster, where it was again processed and summarized, and then reported to Canaris, who, in turn, reported them in parallel to the headquarters of the OKW and personally to Hitler.

And, of course, extensive information was received from agents in the USSR. Soviet military intelligence and, to a greater extent, the NKVD worked with a large number of double agents, supplying them with disinformation about the state and strength of the Red Army. The disinformation was mainly aimed at downplaying the real forces, sometimes by almost an order of magnitude. However, the vast majority of the twins were exposed by the Abwehr and it was not so difficult to distinguish "misinformation" from real information. Of course, sometimes this did not work out, but such cases were the exception rather than the rule.

Abwehr had other sources of information in the USSR. A secret leak came from the General Staff of the Red Army and from the headquarters of the Air Force, bringing Stalin into understandable fury.

Defectors were a particular source of information. We are very fond of savoring defectors from the Germans and do not write anything about our own, of which there were much more. From January 1940 until the outbreak of war on June 22, 1941, there were 327 such people. We are talking only about military personnel, from the Red Army to the colonel. Many fled, taking with them secret documents and maps. If we add to this the extremely

hostile attitude of the population of the Baltic States, Western Ukraine, Belarus and Bessarabia to the Bolshevik regime in general and to the Red Army in particular, it can be stated with confidence that the Abwehr did not lack sources of information.

Among other things, extensive documents of Polish intelligence, which had been engaged in developments in the Soviet Union for a long time, fell into the hands of the Germans. The office of Canaris also worked closely with the Hungarian, Italian, Romanian and Bulgarian intelligence services. In general, Finnish intelligence could be considered part of the Abwehr - so much did it interact with the Germans, sharing with Berlin even the data that the Germans did not request. And Finnish intelligence was very powerful.

As for Stalin's intentions, few people doubted them. It was enough to look at a map with a schematic drawing of even the approximate deployment of Soviet troops on it, as their aggressive-offensive orientation became completely obvious.

Throughout 1940, the Abwehr closely watched the movement of Soviet military groups, trying mainly not to miss the moment when this entire gigantic horde received an order to move west. Colonel Lahousen said on this occasion that such an observation was reminiscent of "listening to the ticking of the clockwork of an infernal machine, when you don't know how long the explosive device has been set for and you have no way either to defuse it or run away somewhere. You know that there will be an explosion, and it will destroy both you and the whole of Europe. The only logical way out was to destroy this mine yourself before its clockwork worked. But for this there was neither the strength nor the means during the entire 1940 of the year.

The Abwehr had information that Moscow was waiting for the start of Operation Sea Lion in order to launch an offensive.

Canaris even knew that the prearranged signal "Thunderstorm" transmitted by all means of military communications would be the signal for the offensive.

The Germans did not yet know about the plan of operation of the same name, but it was obvious that if there was a prearranged signal, then, accordingly, there was a plan of operations. And what its exact code name was, was of secondary importance.

It was also quite clear that the expectation of a landing in England would not last indefinitely. Sooner or later, Stalin will realize that he is being led by the nose, and will time the start of the operation to some new event, hidden for the time being in the haze of dynamic and unpredictable history.

It was no less clear that if Stalin launched such an offensive, then all the available forces of the Wehrmacht, including all the frail forces of Germany's unreliable allies, would not be enough to stop this offensive.

Admiral Canaris was one of those who understood this back in 1940. The past year and four months of the war, although they were marked by great and small triumphs of German weapons, actually completed the process of encircling Germany with an iron ring of implacable enemies. The "garden hose" of President Roosevelt and the issue of "Lend-Lease" raised by him, together with the forthcoming lifting of the "moral embargo" on trade from Russia, quite clearly marked this steel ring. The encirclement process is being completed, and somewhere in the middle of next year, the process of destroying Germany will begin.

And if all this is inevitable, then at least Germany should be crushed by the West - by England and the USA, and not by Stalin.

Then she and the rest of Europe have a chance to be reborn on the basis of the good old European democracy. The capture of Europe by Stalin can give rise to a cataclysm capable of destroying civilization altogether in the universal sense of the word.

The way out was suggested to Canaris during his next secret trip to Sweden. Hitler must strike at Stalin. He needs to be prompted that this is not only his secret desire, corresponding to the theoretical calculations about the "living space for the German people", so juicy set out in Mein Kampf, but also

the only salvation.

The units that Stalin concentrates on the border are located in such a way that they can be easily destroyed in one decisive operation, launched when the tactical surprise.

This will make it possible to push the Red Army back beyond the Dnieper, and with luck even further. Heavy fighting will involve almost all the forces of the Wehrmacht in this operation, preparing the territory of Europe and Germany for a fairly easy liberation. In the last war, Germany capitulated, occupying vast territories of its opponents: from France to Georgia. In this war, an even more grandiose scenario can be played out, when the Wehrmacht will fight somewhere near Kiev or Smolensk (and, with luck, also near Moscow). A landing on the continent and a new (as in 1918) rapid offensive towards the Franco-German border will inevitably lead to the fall of the Hitler regime, which will immediately create the prerequisites for peace negotiations. Then it will be time to deal with Stalin, whose country, which has been the scene of fierce fighting for about a couple of years, will be bled dry and in need of urgent help. It is impossible to exclude the possibility of the fall of the Stalinist regime, since neither the army nor the people will ever forgive him for the destruction of such large military groups on the border. All together, these events, if they become a reality, will create the prerequisites for a fundamentally new world order based on Christian ideology and civil liberties. The ideology of class and national intolerance, apparently, will go further east to the countries of Asia.

The question arose: what if the Russians did not fight at all, but began to surrender en masse or scatter. There were plenty of such examples even during the war with Finland.

If this happens at the first stage, then it's okay. Even opposite. This will allow the Wehrmacht to go as far as possible into Russian territory. As we move deeper into the territory, the German lines of communication will stretch dangerously, and the very configuration of the European part of the USSR in the form of a funnel expanding to the east will inevitably lead to a slowdown in movement, a rupture of ties between various units and, as a result, to a stop. In addition, it is very easy to push Hitler and his party-SS gang to carry out a number of measures against the local population, which will increase the level of resistance of the armed forces and lead, perhaps, remembering the sad experience of Napoleon, to a people's war in the rear of the Wehrmacht, which will increase the bitterness at both sides.

Therefore, the main thing is to prepare for a possible infliction of a sudden stunning blow on the Russians.

This is the only chance to save Europe and Germany from final destruction.

It is easy to say - to inflict a sudden stunning blow on the Red Army. The whole plan is suspended on the thinnest invisible hairs, the breakage of each one can lead to the collapse of the whole plan and to a catastrophe. Imperceptibly deploy along the borders of a potential enemy (and even almost three times stronger than yourself) a multimillion-strong army, so much so that

no one noticed it - it's just impossible. And you should not try to do this - nothing will work, not even taking into account the fact that Stalin's intelligence is global and all-pervading. Although she has so far taken great pleasure in swallowing disinformation, no one knows how much longer she intends to do this and what happens to this disinformation after she digests it?

But there was an equally important problem that needed to be solved "with the greatest possible delicacy," as Canaris once put it in a conversation with Oster.

Hitler understood more and more clearly every day that he simply had no other choice but to attack the USSR. Unlike military professionals, the Fuhrer, sincerely believing that Providence itself was on his side, not only believed in the success of such an attack, but even in the final victory in the outbreak of war. The numbers mean absolutely nothing, he convinced the generals in table conversations, the number of tanks and planes by themselves do not decide anything. They are powerless against the will of the almighty Fate, which predetermined the role of Germany and its people for many millennia to come.

Such moods of Hitler were quite consistent with the global plans of the "new world order", however, Canaris and his subordinates, horrified by intelligence reports coming from the east, with good reason feared that the summary data on the size of the Soviet armed forces and on the number of various types of forces in these forces military equipment will horrify the Fuhrer, forcing him to forget about the benevolence of Providence. In fact, anyone can suspect capricious Providence of treacherous treachery if, while promising you a global victory, it nevertheless arms your opponents so that its own army already looks miserable and almost unarmed.

The scouts were afraid that, having received accurate data on the strength and weapons of the Red Army, Hitler would not dare to attack Stalin, would begin to draw the latter into negotiations, lose precious time and, as a result, frustrate an already very shaky plan, destroying himself, Germany, Europe, and possibly the whole world.

To prevent this from happening, a decision was made

not bring to Hitler and the headquarters of the high command

true data about those hecatombs of weapons that Stalin forged, preparing a surprise for his gullible friend in Berlin. Hitler's habit of falling into noisy tantrums on any insignificant occasion was already well known to those who dealt with him on a regular basis.

It was all the more easy to do this because the disinformation presented by the Abwehr, in general terms, was quite consistent with the disinformation spread by Soviet intelligence, which was making titanic efforts to hide preparations for the Thunderstorm from Germany.

Having accumulated mountains of data on the state of the Red Army, having studied tens of thousands of documents, including testimonies of defectors from Soviet intelligence and the army, and having analyzed a myriad of aerial photographic data, by the end of 1940 the Abwehr knew almost everything about both the current state of the Soviet armed forces and their potential capabilities. taking into account the fact that after Hitler's attack, the USSR automatically becomes an ally of England, and consequently of the United States. Thus, attacking the USSR, Hitler automatically closes the circle of encirclement against him, cuts off Germany from the sources of generous Soviet supplies and finds himself in a completely hopeless situation. Therefore, at least three departments of the Abwehr feverishly falsified the data, presenting them to Hitler as the results of the most thorough analysis.

Canaris repeatedly had to make messages and reports in the presence of Hitler, and he studied well the reaction of the Fuhrer to various specific information about the level of combat readiness and strength of the Red Army.

In August 1940, the admiral presented the following summary to Hitler: "Russia has a total of 151 infantry divisions, 32 cavalry divisions, 38 motorized mechanized brigades.

Until spring, this number cannot increase significantly." Moreover, Canaris added, it is directly possible to deploy 96 infantry, 23 cavalry divisions, 28 motorized mechanized brigades against Germany.

The presentation of such disinformation to Hitler was not clearly consistent with the data presented to Hitler by Halder and Jodl, and, of course, with the information that came through the service of Heydrich and the Foreign Ministry. It was very easy to accuse the latter of complete incompetence, and the generals who warned Hitler that all the digital data on the weapons of the Red Army were greatly underestimated were either accused of superficial analysis of the data or declared alarmists, as once happened to Guderian, whose military intelligence discovered in front of his front there are more Soviet tanks in the tank group than there were, according to intelligence, in the entire Red Army. Hitler always leaned in favor of Canaris' data, because he did not want to believe in "absolutely fantastic figures" about the amount of military equipment pulled together by Stalin to the border. The Fuhrer later admits (after the start of the war) that the amount of Russian weapons (abandoned by the Red Army during the retreat and captured by the Germans) turned out to be "the greatest surprise" for him.

Moreover, carrying out the planned plan, Canaris artificially limited the information reported

only to the depth of the planned first strategic operation and, providing extensive data on the number of formations of the Red Army, on the deployment of its troops and headquarters, etc., convincing Hitler and many generals from his entourage that victory over the first strategic echelon of the Red Army (and Stalin, there were already two of them and a third was being formed) would mean victory over the Soviet Union [55].

However, Hitler, for reasons known only to him alone, was skeptical even of the figures presented to him by Canaris, considering them to be exaggerated. He retained this habit throughout almost the entire war, already having quite a lot of experience and no less great surprises about the Stalinist assembly line that produces soldiers and weapons.

At the headquarters games at the headquarters of the Wehrmacht High Command, held at the end of November 1940 under the leadership of General Paulus, Canaris presented slightly modified data on the composition of the Red Army, which then formed the basis of the Barbarossa plan. A similar calculation, adopted both for the game and for further strategic planning, provided that 125 rifle divisions and 50 tank and motorized mechanized brigades would be put up against Germany. The games were based on "Special superiority of the Germans in artillery, including means of artillery observation, in tanks and communications." The "decisive superiority in aviation" was especially emphasized [56].

On December 18, when Hitler promised to finally review the Otto plan and approve it as a directive, Canaris arrived at the meeting with a prepared secret report, which was entitled: "The wartime armed forces of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as of January 1, 1941 of the year". Later (15

January 1941) this document will be published by the high command of the ground forces in 2 thousand copies and sent to all command and staff authorities of the Wehrmacht, becoming the basis of all German strategic calculations.

The forces of the Red Army were defined as 150 rifle divisions, 32-36 cavalry divisions, 6 motorized mechanized corps and 36 motorized mechanized brigades. The peacetime army is 2 million Human.

"With the development of the war and the conduct of a general mobilization," this masterpiece of Abwehr disinformation went on, "the number of Soviet divisions can be significantly increased." The largest number of fielded divisions was estimated at 209, the number of motorized mechanized brigades - 36.

The number of aircraft was determined at 4,000, the number of tanks at about 3,700 (although there were already 18,000 and 14,000 units, respectively, only in the western regions) [57].

Hitler silently listened to the calculations of Canaris, without interrupting or interfering. Otto's plan, formatted as Directive 21, lay on the table in front of him.

After listening to the head of military intelligence and Halder's remark that it was better not to set a specific date for the attack, but to tie it to the most favorable moment, taking into account the political situation, weather and other things, Hitler broke his own silence and announced that he had decided to give this operation the name "Barbarossa", causing some excitement among those present.

Everyone knew some weakness of Hitler - a great lover and connoisseur of German history - to the German Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, the first and most prominent representative of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, who reigned from 1152 to 1190. His reign was marked by the desire to create a united Europe and was marked by so many significant events that German folklore made Friedrich the hero of numerous legends and tales, attributing almost all the remarkable events of the Middle Ages to the personality of this emperor. Everyone also knew that in 1189, the sixty-seven-year-old emperor, in the name of uniting Europe mired in strife, conceived a crusade to liberate Jerusalem from Sultan Saladin, who had captured the holy city. Personally leading the campaign, Frederick fought his way through the territory of Byzantium, defeating the troops of Emperor Isaac Angel, landed in Asia Minor, where he drowned, crossing the small river Salefu on June 10, 1190. That was the end of the trip.

But no one dared to remind Hitler of this. If the Führer wants the plan to be called Barbarossa, let it be Barbarossa. The main thing is not this. The whole point of the plan is to be the first to strike at Stalin.

Directive No. 21

PLAN "BARBAROSSA"

Fuhrer

and supreme commander of the armed forces.

Supreme Command of the Armed Forces.



Operations headquarters.

Department of National Defense.

No. 33408/40

Fuhrer's Headquarters

December 18, 1940

9 copies.

Ex. No. 1.

Top secret.

For command only.

The German armed forces must be ready to defeat Soviet Russia in a short-term campaign even before the war against England is over (Option "Barbarossa") ...

Having skimmed over the document with his eyes, Hitler put his signature and, without even honoring those present with a word, left the room.

Everything happened so dull and mundane that General Halder did not even note this event in his famous diary.

## Chapter 11

December in Moscow passed to the accompaniment of noisy holidays. "In unison" was celebrated the "Day of the Stalinist Constitution".

Newspapers, choking with delight, noted that if in 1938 the population of the Soviet Union was 169 million people, in 1939 - 183 million people, then in 1940 it already amounted to 193 million, since the Baltic republics joined the USSR, and Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina were freed from the "yoke of the Romanian boyars".

Then elections were held in the newly formed Karelian-Finnish SSR, as well as in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, whose territories had already been more or less cleared of "dangerous social elements" by this time. Thanks to this, the elections once again demonstrated the "convincing victory of the Stalinist bloc of communists and non-party people", although, of course, no one except this bloc participated in the elections.

In Chernivtsi, a candidate for the Supreme Council from their district, General of the Army Zhukov, who commanded the Kyiv Special Military District, addressed the "voters" and assured the audience that "under the wise leadership of Comrade Stalin, our country will become

the most powerful country in the world."

The press reported rather sparingly on world affairs, being almost completely filled with reports on popular enthusiasm in connection with the next anniversary of the Cheka-NKVD on December 20 and, of course, on December 21, it was full of congratulations on the next birthday of Comrade Stalin, who turned 61 years old.

As usual, congratulations were sent by Hitler, Mussolini and Ribbentrop, as well as several other fascist figures of a smaller rank, but with such sonorous names that all the central newspapers of the USSR were later buried in special depositories for many years ...

On December 20, Stalin requested Timoshenko and Meretskov to come and demanded from them an analysis of the military situation in the world, as well as a report on readiness for a military conference and strategic staff games, which were to begin on December 23. The military seized the opportunity and delivered to Stalin for review the lists of "the highest commanding staff involved in the operational-strategic game, with distribution by roles." The lists were compiled separately for the "East" and "Western" sides of the games, which were respectively to be led by Colonel General of the Tank Forces Pavlov and Army General Zhukov, along with about fifty senior officers of various ranks and positions.

After reviewing the lists, Meretskov made a brief presentation. Never since the beginning of the second imperialist war in Europe (this definition, coined in the propaganda department of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, became more and more fashionable and pleased the leader), did the Germans find themselves in such an unbalanced position. On the one hand, they are forced to keep 93-95 divisions on the south coast of the English Channel in readiness for the invasion of the British Isles, which will undoubtedly happen next summer, but, on the other hand, with the current operational inactivity of these troops on the canal, Hitler is increasingly feeling lack of forces in other directions. The British, realizing this, are expanding the theater of operations in those regions, the defense of which Hitler recklessly entrusted to his Italian allies. Over the Italian army in Africa and Greece, despite its numerical and material superiority over the combined Anglo-Greek units, there was already a very real threat of disaster if the Germans did not provide their unlucky allies with quick and direct assistance.

In this regard, the question becomes very interesting: where will Hitler remove the troops - from the canal or from our border? If he withdraws from the canal, then he again refuses to disembark. On the Canal, 94 divisions is the bare minimum for a successful landing on the south coast of England, where 52 British divisions are waiting for Hitler. If he removes from our border, then this will be another confirmation of the secondary importance of the eastern direction and the need to keep troops in Poland only for their recruitment and training at a relative distance from the main theaters of military operations and beyond the reach of enemy aircraft.

If the transfer of troops to Greece from the territories of former Poland and former Czechoslovakia begins, then the accumulation of these units in Romania and Bulgaria, and, possibly, in Yugoslavia, is inevitable, which will expose these units in a state on the march under the flank attack of our troops, creating an environment for them rapid encirclement and destruction.

The chief of the general staff fell silent, waiting for some kind of remark from Stalin.

The leader, who was walking around the office, went up to the table and began to beat his pipe into a large crystal ashtray, which always served as a signal that he had heard everything, but did not intend to comment.

The pause dragged on, and Stalin, having finished his pipe, asked:

– What is your opinion, Comrade Timoshenko?

The Commissar was covered with red spots. There was nothing more dangerous than expressing your opinion to Stalin if it did not correspond to the opinion of the leader.

But no less dangerous was the absence of any personal opinion on the issue of interest to Stalin. At all meetings in the presence of Stalin, the leaders of the party, state, army and punitive organs were fully armed with the knowledge of Stalin's opinion on almost all issues.

"I think it's necessary to act according to the situation, Comrade Stalin," the not very competent People's Commissar of Defense strained out of himself, "the situation - it will always tell you ...

Stalin would not be Stalin if someone came to his office with questions about which he would not yet know and would not have at least a preliminary, but his own opinion on them. Even if it's fundamentally wrong.

Even before the advent of the people's commissar of defense and the chief of the general staff, Stalin managed to consult with his favorite Shaposhnikov, whom he always trusted more than all other marshals and generals combined.

Shaposhnikov's opinion was basically the same as Timoshenko's. Wait for the situation to develop. The Germans are on an adventure. The terrain is inaccessible, mountainous. The people there are warlike and proud, they are trained to fight, especially under the cover of British aviation. Stuck there, the Germans will have no choice but to strike at the British mother country itself. That's when, as planned, we will begin. The wise marshal pinned great hopes on Yugoslavia, no less than at the beginning of the last war, Russian strategists pinned on Serbia. And he would not advise anyone to get into Yugoslavia. There is a combat-ready and courageous army, relying on the support of a no less courageous people, who will all take up arms in the event of any threat to their independence. The Germans will be able to get stuck there firmly and for a long time. So we will have the opportunity to choose the most favorable moment for the offensive.

On the eve of the planned strategic games, from December 23 to 31, a meeting of the top leadership of the Red Army was scheduled, at which the commander of the Kiev Special Military District, General of the Army Zhukov, who had recently become a deputy of the Supreme Council, was to make the main report. The topic of his report was "The nature of the modern offensive operation." The general, based on his own recent experience of the battles at Khalkhin Gol and on the year-long experience of the "second imperialist war" in Europe, had to outline the scheme for future actions of all branches of the Armed Forces within the framework of the national strategy - "little blood on foreign territory." Stalin liked Zhukov's decisiveness, ruthlessness and energy, liked his temper and rudeness, the ease with which the commander put his subordinates against the wall for the slightest misses in service, liked his peasant-proletarian origin. I also liked the fact that Zhukov was not an officer (even a junior one) during the First World War, was not Trotsky's nominee during the Civil War, almost all of it was "cut off by an ordinary and junior commander" and that he took place under the wing of Semyon Budyonny in the last invented cavalry general headquarters. Comrade Stalin did not like only one thing: the army general's lack of any military education. The commander of the Kyiv Special Military District did not even graduate from college, and he had only the wartime cavalry courses of the tsarist army, which produced candidates for non-commissioned officers, in his soul. In a civil war, this would have been enough to become a commander, having some former lieutenant as chief of staff, but now even Stalin has

doubts arose whether the general was suitable for his position.

Stalin was well aware that no amount of education can make a person a leader. A leader must be born like a poet or a musician. Despite the lack of education, and perhaps precisely because of this, Zhukov was a complete type of leader of the Stalinist type - a kind of ideal performer who conceived the leader to implement his global plans. Stalin felt in Zhukov "an unnatural, cruel, almost inhuman concentration of will", as in himself, and therefore believed that this person did not need any education. By his methods, he will achieve more than the graduates of the most brilliant military academies [58].

A few months ago, the leader requested Zhukov's personal file and from time to time looked through it thoughtfully, with the tenderness of an old clerk, sorting through the papers hemmed there.

Stalin often personally engaged in the so-called "personnel archeology", deciding the fate of those who had the courage to break into leadership in conditions of permanent terror. Shoot, arrest, leave in office, but imprison his wife, leave himself and his wife, but imprison the son or husband of the daughter, or the brother of the wife, or ... there were countless options  
a bunch of.

And whoever thinks that the leader was just sadistically having fun will be deeply wrong. Not at all. The leader simply fought against stagnation, informing the country of forward movement, not allowing the bureaucratic apparatus created by him to petrify and thus capture himself.

Stalin did not want to become a hostage of the apparatus and did not leave it in a state of rest for a second, constantly mixing and sifting through the sieve of the NKVD the party-bureaucratic nomenklatura.

The personal file of Army General Zhukov was plump, like a collection of works by some prolific classic, published in one volume.

Everything is as it should be: data on parents, studying at a parish school, working as a saddler in Moscow, conscription into the army, service in the royal cavalry, awarding two St. George crosses (underlined), service in the civil war, service in the Red Army; squadron commander, regiment commander, first denunciations, first explanatory, own denunciations.

References, reports, dashing cavalry drinking parties in the company of Budyonny and Timoshenko, messages like "I tend to play melodies from the old-fashioned, and therefore ideologically harmful repertoire" on the button accordion, complaints about rudeness, tyranny, and assault. Party penalties: "... in 38, for the fact that during my work as commander and commissar of the 4th Cossack division in the period from 33-37, I allowed a case of rudeness, allowed a case of fraud in parts of the division, paid insufficient attention to political party work, allowed two cases of clamping down on criticism, the party organization reprimanded me and entered it on my personal card. 02/09/38". To receive in February 1938 a reprimand with a record was almost tantamount to a death sentence. Moreover, there was close communication with the enemies of the people.

"I never had any connection with the enemies of the people and never have. I have never been to them and I have never received them either. My wife also had no connection with the enemies of the people, did not communicate, never visited them. Communication with Uborevich, Mekhlis and other enemies of the people from the command of the district was only purely official. 03/09/1938". Here is Yezhov's idea of the need for arrest, since the connection

Zhukov with such bitter enemies of the party and people as Uborevich, Yakir, Blucher and Guy. Stalin's resolution: "Vol. Yezhov. Should we additionally check Comrade Zhukov in action? I think it's worth it. Stalin." And he sent Zhukov to the Far East out of harm's way. But then reports from the commander of the Far Eastern Front poured in.

Stern assured that only his personal intervention saved the Soviet and Mongolian troops from the second Mukden, since, leading the troops, Zhukov almost one to one began to repeat all the mistakes of the unforgettable General Kuropatkin, with the only difference that Kuropatkin did not shoot anyone, and Zhukov managed sentence 19 senior officers to death. Stern proudly reported that he had canceled "these monstrous sentences" with his power. As a result of all these squabbles, Comrade Stalin, as always, made a conclusion unexpected for everyone: it is possible to work with Zhukov, but not with Stern.

When assigning personal military ranks, Zhukov became an army general and received command of one of the key military districts - Kiev Special, and Stern became only a colonel general. He chose Zhukov precisely because, with the sixth sense of an experienced administrator, he saw in him exactly the person who, possessing almost the same concentrate of bestial energy, will and cruelty as he himself, is essentially the only person who could carry out the Thunderstorm operation. "exactly as Stalin intended it - to ride across Europe with a powerful steam roller, regardless of either one's own or other people's losses, driving troops forward with their inhuman energy through the mountains of their own and other people's corpses.

All the orders and certifications signed by Zhukov in recent years were neatly filed into the case. Stalin drew attention to the last certification, across which a resolution was imposed: "I agree. Commander of the KOVO Army General Zhukov. November 26, 1940" It was an attestation "for the period from 1939 to October 1940 for the commander of the 99th rifle division, Major General Vlasov Andrey Andreevich, born in 1901, Russian, member of the CPSU (b) since 1930." The attestation was opened with the words: "Betrayed to the party of Lenin-Stalin and the socialist Motherland. Perfectly comprehensively developed, he loves military affairs, works a lot on himself, studies and knows military history well, is a good leader and methodologist, has high operational and tactical training. General Vlasov successfully combines high theoretical training with practical experience and the ability to transfer his knowledge and experience to his subordinates. High demands on oneself and subordinates - with constant concern for subordinates. He is energetic, bold in decisions, initiative ... His authority among the commanders and fighters of the division is high. Physically healthy and fit for field life.

Conclusion: The position is quite consistent. In wartime, it can be used as a corps commander ... "

Comrade Stalin had already heard a lot about Vlasov as the commander of an exemplary rifle division, which was presented as an example and imitation of all the armed forces of the country. Stalin was also present at the presentation of the Order of Lenin to General Vlasov Kalinin, but he did not personally get to know him, although he clearly liked the tall, lean general. Since he is being dragged upstairs by people like Timoshenko and Zhukov, who are ordered to carefully select cadres of top commanders who are physically and morally capable of carrying out Operation Thunderstorm, then this person corresponds to the indicated qualities. The leader did not like the words "and personally devoted to you, Comrade Stalin." First, he did not believe in anyone's personal loyalty. He would rather believe in the words "and he is afraid of you to death, Comrade Stalin", if someone dared to utter such words in his presence. Secondly, he repeatedly emphasized that devotion to the leader - the bearer of a certain idea - is not enough. One must believe in the idea itself, and only then will the idea become invincible and unfading. Devotion to the idea, combined with recognition of the authority of the leader, is what is required, not personal loyalty. But it is precisely the devotion to the idea that he

I almost didn't feel it in anyone.

It was clear to Stalin and many people from his entourage that the country, whose only ideology was the incessant (as Lenin bequeathed) terror, lives, if we discard all the propaganda husks, in a state of constantly escalating internal political crisis. In the 20 years that have passed since the end of the civil war, this crisis has shaken and contorted the country with seizures reminiscent of epileptic seizures without a moment's respite.

Stalin conceived the "Thunderstorm" not only because it fully corresponded to his ambitious plans to prove the correctness of Lenin's prophecies of spreading communist ideology throughout the world and thereby achieving world domination, but also because the war and the world crisis that preceded it were seen by him as the only way out. from an internal crisis, since no country in the world could exist for a long time in the form of a huge military-police zone that Stalin blinded from the Russian Empire destroyed by Lenin. And like Lenin, in order to save himself and his regime, Stalin raised his accomplices to robbery, but, unlike Lenin, on a truly international scale, which Vladimir Ilyich could only dream of.

Constantly shuffling the nomenklatura deck, carefully weighing each candidate on the scales of potential danger to himself, Stalin settled on the candidacy of General Zhukov as optimally suited to him at this stage. The leader decided to make Zhukov People's Commissar of Defense, move Timoshenko to his deputies, and re-appoint the strict, wise Shaposhnikov as Chief of the General Staff.

That is why the leader began to closely monitor whom Zhukov, anticipating his rapid ascent to the top, would pull along with him, which is quite natural for any military man. Even a platoon commander, becoming a company commander, strives to take an intelligent sergeant with him. And it was clear that Zhukov was the first to drag General Vlasov behind him. Stalin will not forget this until the end of his days [59].

Having released the military, Stalin on the same day went to the columned hall of the House of the Unions, where the next - 22nd - anniversary of the VChK-NKVD bodies was celebrated. The ceremony was much less solemn than the celebration of the 20th anniversary in 1938 at the premises of the Bolshoi Theatre. Firstly, the date was not round, and there was no one to remember the solemn meeting at the Bolshoi Theater. Almost everyone who celebrated the twentieth anniversary of their department so noisily was shot without exception.

Late in the evening, a report came from the ambassador (plenipotentiary representative) in Germany, Vladimir Dekanozov, who on the eve (December 19) was finally received with credentials by Hitler after almost a month of waiting, which already caused various ominous rumors and conjectures, and for Comrade Stalin - bewilderment and gloomy forebodings.

Hitler, according to Dekanozov, made every effort to appear as amiable and hospitable as possible. (Apparently, this was not easy, since the Fuhrer had just signed the Barbarossa plan a day ago. Although Dekanozov did not know about this, he nevertheless noticed some nervousness and tension in Hitler.)

The Fuhrer apologized to the plenipotentiary for the fact that he had to wait so long for an appointment. There is a war going on. He is very busy directing the fighting for the final crushing of England, which will follow - let Mr. Ambassador mark his words - no later than the beginning of July next year.

Dekanozov asked Hitler why Germany was silent about

the latest Soviet proposals. Hitler remarked that for a final answer to the Soviet proposals extensive consultations with Italy and Japan would have to be held, for which there was absolutely no time.

The main task that Dekanozov received when he went to Berlin was not only and not so much intelligence of Hitler's intentions regarding the Soviet Union, as monitoring the intrigues of the British in the sphere of Soviet-German relations. Soviet agents in England, consisting of clever disinformers, who later received the nickname of the "Magnificent Five from Cambridge", anxiously reported to Moscow that a conspiracy was weaving in the depths of British intelligence and the English "ruling class", the purpose of which was to set Germany against the Soviet Union, and Soviet Union against Germany by spreading disinformation and falsification. They are already bombarding our agents all over the world with their misinformation, confusing analysts in the NKVD and the GRU. General Golikov reassured the leader: his people were experienced enough to distinguish information from disinformation. The British will never succeed in realizing their nefarious plans!

Golikov knew better than anyone how successful the British "conspirators" had been in penetrating the holy of holies of the GRU - the central information department, the head of which, Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets, appeared before him every day with a report on the constant increase in German divisions on the border with the USSR. The agents of Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, operating in the border deployment zone of a potential enemy, constantly reported an increase in the number of German troops.

Messages coming from different, unrelated sources were already plausible, if only because they did not contradict each other. But the Recruit's subordinates did not take them blindly on faith. They checked and double-checked the information received, carefully recording all the data and taking each division into account. They registered the number of the division, its organization and combat strength. The division's commander and senior officers were listed on the division's record card. They found out their characters and tastes: who has a craving for alcohol, who - for cards, who - for women, and who - for the whole "bouquet" of simple officer entertainment. The amount of such data left no doubt about their reliability. With regularity, once a month, lieutenant colonel Novobranets issued an intelligence report under his signature for distribution according to the approved order: to all members of the Politburo and the government, the General Staff, central military institutions, headquarters of military districts and troops - up to and including the headquarters of the corps. The head of the GRU, General Golikov, approved such a report.

In addition to the usual intelligence reports, the Recruit Department issued, with much greater frequency, the so-called "Special Messages" labeled "Top Secret. of particular importance." These "special messages" were distributed according to a list approved by Stalin. The list included Stalin himself, Molotov, Malenkov, Beria, Timoshenko, Meretskov, and later Zhukov.

In addition to intelligence information, the GRU received a variety of data from rumors to anonymous letters from all over the world. One of these letters, signed with the words "Your friend", General Golikov handed over to the Rookie after the next report and ordered him to report his opinion. The recruit carefully studied the letter written on several sheets of student notebook. Anonymous wrote about the inevitability of a German attack on the USSR, arguing that Stalin made a big mistake by interrupting negotiations with Anglo-French representatives and concluding a non-aggression pact and a friendship treaty with Germany. The author of the letter characterized this pact as a false diplomatic step and called on the Soviet Union to be vigilant and ready: Hitler had already ordered the transfer of troops to the East and any delay on the part of the Soviet Union would be fatal.

dangerous.

The next day, Golikov asked the lieutenant colonel what he thought of the letter. The recruit replied that he fully shared the anonymous opinion and advised to send a letter to Stalin as a "special message".

Golikov was clearly dissatisfied with the answer of his subordinate:

- Yes, what are you? Do you understand what you are saying? After all, he wants to push our foreheads against Germany? The Germans are going to strike at England, to cross the English Channel. If we act as this "friend" advises, we will only frighten the Germans by our actions and provoke them against us. So does the owner.

Stalin was called "the master", and the lieutenant colonel realized that this letter had already been with Stalin before him and that General Golikov was expressing not his own, but his point of view. The recruit began to understand the horror of the situation. Stalin and his entourage live in some kind of illusory world, detached from reality. They do not even want to hear about the true situation, if it contradicts some of their incomprehensible calculations. However, the brave lieutenant colonel, knowing full well that he was risking his head, decided not to give up, hoping to convince at least his own command.

On the eve of the beginning of the all-army meeting and strategic games, Golikov ordered the Rookie to prepare the so-called "mob note" on Germany to determine the possible scale of the deployment of the German army in an attack on the USSR. Using his data, Rookie prepared two options for deploying the enemy: for a lightning war (blitzkrieg) and for a long one, determining the number of divisions, respectively: 220 and 230. A map was attached to the note, which showed the existing groupings of German troops on the Soviet borders and possible options for their actions [60].

Having finished the work, the lieutenant colonel presented the "note" to Golikov.

He looked at the diagram for a long time, with obvious interest. Then he put down his papers and said to the Rookie: "Your considerations are correct, but this is only

assumptions. In reality, these groups do not exist.

- Why not, comrade general ?! exclaimed Lieutenant Colonel Rookie. - These groups are not my fiction, they are quite real. We have precisely established each division - not only its deployment, the composition of the organization, but even the commander. How can you doubt such accurate information?

Golikov put the "mob note" in the safe and said dryly:

You can go, you are free.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie was well aware of the command's plan: to wait for the Germans to invade England and strike them from the rear. The plan was good, but if the Germans really did not suspect anything, then the number of German divisions on our borders should have been steadily decreasing, but this number was increasing with alarming constancy. So the Germans know our plan and they, fooling us, are going to inflict a crushing blow on us? Why else would they build up their strength?

The explanation that the second echelon of the invasion of England was being formed on the eastern borders of Germany, far from the influence and prying eyes of enemy aircraft, also did not suit Lieutenant Colonel Rookie. The location of the units is such that they are clearly aiming for an invasion, and are not engaged in formation, preparing for a campaign to the other end of Europe. If we are now, i.e. at the end of December 1940, we will move our armies to the west,



then we will already find ourselves in a stupid position, since we will run into 110 divisions, of which 11 are tank divisions. As a result, instead of a relatively easy breakthrough to Europe, we will get stuck in battles that still don't know how and will end.

If we continue to sit and wait for the landing in England, as the Germans are trying to convince us all the time, then in the end we will fall under such a blow from them, from which it will be very difficult to recover. However, no arguments worked against Golikov. Of all the Rookie reports, the head of the GRU removed about a third of the German divisions, reducing their number to 72.

Finally, the Rookie could not stand it and bluntly declared to his superior:

- Comrade General, I do not agree with your practice of "cutting off" the number of divisions that we indicate. The time has already come for the next report on Germany, and I cannot release it with distorted data.

Golikov silently took a sheet of Alexandrian paper from the safe, unfolded it on the table and said: "Here, Lieutenant Colonel, is the actual situation on our borders. Take a look and stop panicking!"

The recruit glanced at the diagram, where the blue icons marked the German divisions deployed along the Soviet borders, and inquired about the source of this information.

"This scheme," Golikov explained, "was handed over to us by the Yugoslav military attaché, Colonel Putnik. The "boss" also considers these data absolutely correct.

Having ordered the Rookie to take this scheme and redo the summary on its basis, General Golikov dismissed the lieutenant colonel with the words: "And let's not argue anymore."

Having sat down to study the scheme of Colonel Putnik, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie drew attention to the fact that the number of divisions on it was greatly reduced and they were located on the border without any idea. This is how troops are actually deployed, pulled into some area for the purpose of reorganization. However, the numbering of the divisions coincided with the data that were available in the old reports compiled by the Recruit's department.

The lieutenant colonel had no doubts that this was a German disinformation, but he realized with horror that his top secret reports were falling into the hands of the Germans and that most of the agents, who were accustomed to consider absolutely reliable, were in fact engaged in disinformation. Moreover, it became clear to him that disinformation is being very cleverly conveyed through our own intelligence and government channels. It was characteristic that the disinformation material did not get to the GRU from the so-called "own" sources, but came from above. Moreover, the path of the "disinformation" was very original: at first she got into the foreign department of the NKVD or to the "neighbors", as the GRU liked to put it, penetrating into the NKVD and counterintelligence agent network. Then, with the help of Beria, who was a member of the Politburo, the disinformation got to Stalin and from Stalin came to the GRU, where it could not be ignored [61].

Having studied Putnik's scheme and made a copy of it, the Rookie returned it to Golikov, firmly stating that it was pure disinformation. He also expressed his opinion in the form of an official report.

Demonstrating super-patience, General Golikov tried to convince his stubborn subordinate. Expanding again the diagram of the Yugoslav double agent, Golikov began to explain to the Rookie how logical and plausible everything in this diagram looks. The main forces of Germany, as proved by many reports from various sources, are in

northern France and are preparing to deliver a decisive blow to England. There's all sorts of evidence here. Does the recruit consider himself smarter and more perspicacious than everyone else, including Comrade Stalin himself?

This is all the legacy of the exposed enemy of the people, General Proskurov, who, when he was the head of the GRU, inspired all his subordinates that the Sea Lion operation was impossible in principle and did not want to reckon with any other opinions until his arrest. The allusion to the arrested general, who at one time invited the Rookie to work in the GRU, was more than understandable. There has already been more than one meeting in the GRU demanding "to burn Proskurov's betrayal out of intelligence with a red-hot iron."

Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets knew about all this, realizing that it was he who made up that part of the "Proskurov legacy" that should be burned with a red-hot iron.

But he could not stop at the sight of general blindness.

He knew that it was not at all General Proskurov who inspired his subordinates with the opinion that a German invasion of England was impossible, but they themselves came to a similar conclusion based on a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the forces and capabilities of both the Germans and English.

The picture was completely obvious to the lieutenant colonel, and he could not understand why everyone at the top unconditionally believed in the Sea Lion operation, although this was a common, albeit special in form, disinformation.

Objections at meetings rained down. Why do the Germans continue such costly raids on Britain, constantly increasing the power of their strikes and incurring corresponding losses in materiel and people? With figures in hand, Rookie tried to prove that, on the contrary, the intensity of the fighting over England was declining. It's just that both sides make more propaganda noise about this, significantly increasing in their reports both the forces involved and the losses, both their own and the enemy's. In reality, the British are withdrawing troops from the mother country, transferring them in whole divisions to the Mediterranean and North Africa. Would they have done so if their islands were in real danger?

The British did not remove divisions from the islands of the metropolis, objected to him, but brought them from the dominions: Australia, New Zealand and Canada, as well as from India. Their intentions are clear. In this way, they first of all want to pull off a certain number of German units from the English Channel. Lieutenant Colonel Rookie should be no worse than others who have access to top-secret intelligence information, he knows the latest reports from Comrade Kim Philby (and not him alone) about what kind of panic in anticipation of a German invasion now reigns in the British Isles, which was not even in the summer and in early autumn of this year. The royal family, the government, the leaders of major political parties, the bigwigs of the City and many others are ready for an urgent evacuation to Canada. In the mountains of Scotland, preparations are underway for guerrilla warfare. Interesting documents fell into the hands of our intelligence about the destruction by the British of their own naval bases in the event of a German invasion and about the evacuation of the formations of the metropolitan fleet to the bases of dominions and colonies. There is even a list of ships and vessels that should be blown up to block ports and bases. Is this all done for some kind of misinformation? Why should the British misinform us in any way? If they are trying to pit the USSR and Germany against each other, then these are clearly not the right methods.

From this only one thing is clear, the recruit insisted, that the British, like the Germans, are also interested in us believing in the possibility of a German invasion of their islands. This is quite logical - they do not want our trip to Europe at all and want

give the initiative to Hitler in the coming clash with the USSR. Therefore, despite the war, their special services work in the same direction, although with different goals. For the British, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union is not only the most real way to salvation, but also the opportunity to finally lock Germany into a ring of implacable opponents. For Hitler, let's not kid ourselves, this is the only way to prolong his own existence.

Opponents agreed that there was a certain logic in Rookie's reasoning. (The words of the Rookie that his reasoning is not based on logic at all, on

no one heard reliable information.) But, the opponents continued, Hitler, mindful of the past, would never dare to fight on two fronts. And for all the facts cited by the Rookie in a boring enumeration of divisions and their locations, there are a lot of facts proving that his point of view is erroneous.

Relatively recently, the "neighbors" (i.e., NKVD intelligence) obtained a curious document signed by the chief of the Nazi security service, SS Obergruppenführer Heydrich. This is the action plan of the Gestapo and other German punitive organs in the occupied territories of the British Isles. The plan is so carefully crafted that it is hard to imagine that such pedantic Germans would take the time of agencies such as their own security service in compiling such detailed documents only for the purpose of misleading the Soviet side.

And finally, almost a day later, the Germans send reconnaissance and sabotage parties to the coast of southern England, sometimes by force up to a platoon, in order to reconnoitre specific landing sites, terrain, enemy forces, and the like. As a rule, these groups either die or are captured. Is this also for misinformation? The recruit replied that Heydrich's office was precisely the place where all the "disinformation" was forged. He personally would not have believed a single document emanating from the Nazi security service.

As for the death of German sabotage groups on the coast, Rookie argued, for the sake of global disinformation, you can sacrifice much more than a few dozen soldiers and pilots.

Many honestly said that the Rookie's arguments did not sound very convincing. Even quotes from Hitler's private conversations, obtained by the British and intercepted by Soviet intelligence, did not help. Hitler allegedly said: "If we defeat England militarily, the British Empire will fall apart, but Germany will not gain anything from this. The defeat of England will be achieved at the cost of German blood, and Japan, America and others will reap the rewards.

This phrase has also been exposed as an English misinformation. The recruit already then suspected that Stalin and his inner circle so wanted England to be destroyed that it would be impossible to dissuade them about Hitler's plans.

The time was approaching for a secret meeting of the senior command staff of the Red Army and the strategic games finalizing the development of the Thunderstorm, and long and painful discussions were still going on in the GRU about how many German divisions were on the borders of eastern Poland and East Prussia and where Hitler was still aiming the next blow - to England or the USSR?

The next report on Germany, which the Rookie was ordered to prepare for the start of the games, was still not compiled. The lieutenant colonel, realizing what he was risking, began to hesitate. A cowardly thought crept up: to spit on everything, not to bang your head against the wall, but to do as the authorities order. However, like all honest people of the middle

The link, brought up in the grip of totalitarianism with their sincere faith in the holy infallibility of the leader, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie came to a firm conviction: the enemies who have penetrated to the very top of the party and state leadership are deceiving Comrade Stalin, preventing him from learning about the true situation and making the necessary decisions. That is why the courageous and stubborn officer eventually decided to go practically to suicide, but to convey the truthful information to the leader, risking "disappearing without a trace" at the same time, as his former boss, General Proskurov, disappeared.

After another report to Golikov, when the head of the GRU, in addition to the previous ones, "cut off" another 15 German divisions, the lieutenant colonel decided to act independently. Ordering his deputy to prepare all the necessary materials and data collected by the information department, the Rookie began to draw up a summary, which took a little more than a day. It was report No. 8 for December 1940. It said: "Recently, mass transfers of German troops to our borders have been noted. These transfers are carefully camouflaged and hidden. As of December 1940, about one hundred and ten divisions were concentrated on our borders, of which eleven were tank divisions. The very location of these formations leaves no doubt that they are aimed at invading our territory ... "

The diagram attached to the report showed all the German troops - up to the division and a separate unit. In the conclusions, it was written that such a huge number of troops was concentrated not to improve quartering conditions, as Hitler stated and German diplomats repeated, but for the war against the USSR.

To begin with, the Rookie showed this summary to his friend and classmate after graduating from the Academy. Frunze to Major General Rybalko, who also served in the GRU at that time. Comparing the scheme drawn up by the Novice with the scheme of the Yugoslav colonel, Rybalko immediately understood the position in which the head of the information department had fallen. "They might blow your head off," the highly experienced general warned, "Stalin won't believe you, and you're dead."

Rybalko, knowing the exceptional decency of the Rookie, took the opportunity to express his own thoughts, which had been boiling over lately. What's going on in the army? At Khalkhin Gol and in Finland they disgraced the whole world. The army is commanded by illiterate people - squadron commanders, sergeants without education and experience. And hundreds of educated officers who graduated from academies sit for years in headquarters in secondary positions. There is some reverse natural selection going on. Everything possible is being done to disgrace the army again to the whole world in the next war.

After talking with Rybalko, the Rookie's decision to see things through to the end became firm, although he still did not see a way to bypass his immediate superiors in the process.

According to existing practice, all information documents of the GRU, including reports, were compiled and signed by the head of the information department. The signal copy, as already noted, was to be reported to Golikov and only after its approval was sent to the troops and to those persons who were included in the "special assignment".

The recruit decided to send a report to the troops without the knowledge of General Golikov, which in itself was a completely unprecedented case. But, according to the lieutenant colonel, there was no other way out. Calling the head of the printing house, Novobranets handed him a summary, ordered it to be urgently printed, and an advance copy to be delivered to him, allegedly for a report to Golikov. Having received a message that the report was ready, the Rookie ordered that the circulation be handed over to the expedition for distribution, and the received signal copy was locked in his safe. Then he called the head of the expedition and asked to send a report to the troops as soon as possible,

recommending last of all to send out a summary to Moscow addresses. In Moscow, they say, they will always have time to get it. Soon, confirmations about the receipt of the report began to arrive from the district headquarters.

Now the most difficult thing lay ahead: to report the signal copy to Golikov retroactively. Anticipating "many bad moments," Rookie entered the GRU chief's office and silently placed the report on the table in front of him. Golikov leafed through the brochure and began to examine the diagram. The face of General Golikov first expressed surprise, then bewilderment, and then Golikov threw the report away and slammed his fist on the table. For the always level-headed general, this was a display of extreme anger. Pulling himself together, Golikov asked the Rookie if he had received from someone the task of provoking a war with Germany? What does he achieve by raising such a panic? Can the Rookie answer him articulately?

The lieutenant colonel, also trying to control himself, said that the main duty of intelligence is not only to supply its command with real information and, if possible, not participate in its disinformation, but also, if necessary, to suggest the command the right decision. So, he believes that if we expect that, in connection with the Sea Lion operation, the Germans will begin to expose our border and we will be able to easily carry out the planned operation, then we can not count on all this. The Germans are not going to transfer troops anywhere from our borders, but, on the contrary, they are constantly reinforcing them. It follows from this that they know our plans and, of course, they are not going to follow them. And it follows from this that we, in turn, should not wait any longer, and right now, when we still have almost a double superiority over the Germans, while they have not yet reached our border along its entire length, while the sources of Romanian oil are still not well defended, strike first, staging several frontier incidents that can be represented as a German attack.

Listening to his subordinate, General Golikov did not utter a word, and then returned the report to him, saying that he did not intend to approve such a document, forbade it to be sent to the troops and ordered that the entire circulation be destroyed.

Then, in an even and quiet voice, the Rookie reported that the report had already been sent to the troops.

It was too much even for the cold-blooded Golikov.

"Did you send a summary without my approval and permission?" - asked the head of the GRU.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie confirmed that this is exactly what happened, since the matter is very serious, where any delay is worse than a crime.

Golikov lost his tongue for a moment, and then cursed from the heart. Calling the Recruit an "irresponsible idiot", a "maniac" who wants to put the entire intelligence department under the knife, a "dreamer" with obsessive ideas, the general announced the removal of the lieutenant colonel from his post and bringing him to justice for repeated attempts to misinform the command, using this official position.

However, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie was ready for just such a development of events. Asking not to yell at himself, he declared that he was ready, as the head of the information department, to answer for his report with his head, and since his views differed so much from the views of General Golikov, he asked to be given the opportunity to personally report to the Chief of the General Staff. If such an opportunity is not given to him, he will find his own way out directly to Army General Meretskov.

All right, Golikov agreed, I'll arrange a personal report for you. Just don't regret it later.

Returning to his department, the Rookie wrote a detailed report addressed to the Chief of the General Staff, then prepared a "special message" to Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov, Timoshenko and Beria, where he gave a detailed description of the threat looming over the country and attached "summary No. 8".

He was already finishing his work when the head of the Academy of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Mordvinov, called, asking if the matter was really as serious as it was written in the summary.

Even more seriously, the Rookie confirmed.

"But they didn't go crazy," General Mordvinov noted, "to rush at us with the forces they have in Poland and East Prussia, even if these forces really correspond to what you indicated in the report. You know our strengths."

Our forces The rookie knew, but he remarked to the general that in these times, with a powerful surprise strike, any number of people and equipment can be mixed with any amount of land. Do not forget that our troops do not have any plan for the retreat, which is forbidden even to mention. If they are forced to retreat with the first sudden blow, then such a mass of troops and military equipment that we have on the western borders will immediately cause a stampede and confusion on the roads, the retreat will develop into a flight, a flight into a catastrophe. That's what worries him. Under no circumstances should the Germans be allowed to strike first. And if, of course, 70 divisions are not enough for this, then 110 divisions are quite enough. It's not clear why no one cares.

"Don't panic," the head of the Academy of the General Staff reassured his old friend. "If they strike from Poland, they will expose their flank to our southern group and expose Romania."

- All this is true, - the lieutenant colonel agreed, - but it will be a meat grinder, which will eventually break all our plans.

About what plans there is a speech, both understood and did not specify.

In the event of a German attack, the Thunderstorm lost the element of strategic (and tactical) surprise, and therefore became practically impossible to carry out.

Soon, Rookie and Golikov were summoned by the Chief of the General Staff, General of the Army Meretskov. According to the custom of that time, the call came at two in the morning.

Meretskov received the scouts in the presence of General Vasilevsky, Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff.

On the large tablet, the Recruit unfolded his map and all related materials. He spoke at length and in detail. The generals listened in silence, attentively, without interrupting.

Army General Meretskov knew, of course, much more than Lieutenant Colonel Rookie was supposed to know. Being one of the main developers of the Thunderstorm, he did not believe in the success of this operation and in its expediency. First of all, he believed that the army in its current state was not capable of carrying out an operation of such a scale, if only because it did not have flexible and clear control. The gigantic pincers of the global offensive conceived will disintegrate, become bogged down, left without fuel, ammunition and food long before they can close. "Thunderstorm", according to Meretskov, will only lead to great chaos, first in Europe, and then in the USSR. Any success in the "Thunderstorm" will decompose the army and the country, and failure will ruin it.

But he knew that Stalin was so obsessed with this operation that he often lost touch with reality.

"Do you think," Meretskov asked the Rookie, "that Hitler can attack us without ending the war with England. In other words, start a war on two fronts again? Is it with his resources? State your opinion, why do you think so."

"Yes, because he has nowhere to go," the Rookie blurted out unexpectedly even for himself. - He's not a fool, Comrade General of the Army. He sees that we are preparing for an attack and will crush him. And he understands that he needs to strike himself, since our army does not even have a plan for a tactical withdrawal, not to mention a strategic retreat.

The recruit hit the most painful point of the Chief of the General Staff. A huge army deployed under the doctrine of a swift offensive on the western borders with its complex and multi-layered economy of the modern armed forces, without having a plan for a strategic retreat, can be turned into a fleeing uncontrollable crowd with one blow. However, Meretskov was already afraid to raise this issue not only with Stalin, but even with the people's commissar for defense, Marshal Timoshenko.

- Did you send a summary to the leaders of the party and government? Meretskov asked cautiously, although the question had only one meaning: did you send this report to Stalin?

"That's right," the Rookie reported. - According to the order, a summary and a special message with a special courier were sent to Stalin, Timoshenko, Malenkov and others.

After a little hesitation, Meretskov ordered Golikov to approve report No. 8, and the Rookie shook hands and thanked him, which meant at least leaving the lieutenant colonel in his position until further notice.

General Meretskov was to open a meeting of the highest commanding staff of the Red Army and take part in strategic games. He knew that these events were conceived by Stalin as the final polishing of the upcoming global offensive. They are not going to talk about anything else at the meeting. With difficulty, we managed to break through one report on the defense, and even then it was the defense of positions captured from the enemy in case of a deep breakthrough forward and a possible lag of neighbors or our own rear. It was forbidden to talk about withdrawal, and even more so about a major retreat, at the meeting. Meretskov really wanted to raise this issue - he understood that if he did not do this, then no one would, and he himself would be made a scapegoat. It would be nice to enlist the support of People's Commissar Timoshenko, but relations between them have developed in such a way that it would be at least rash to hope for this.

Only in the very morning, General of the Army Meretskov forgot himself for a short sleep on the sofa in the rest room adjacent to his office.

Stalin looked through report No. 8 on December 22, having arrived at the Kremlin at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon from a nearby dacha. The summary made no impression on him. She returned to Poskrebyshev to file the file without any notes or instructions: call someone for clarification, check the information, name those responsible and the executors.

The day before, the leader modestly and simply celebrated his birthday in the circle of children and closest party comrades. Present: Molotov, Voroshilov, Malenkov, Beria. The absence of Kaganovich, Kalinin and Timoshenko was striking. And also Zhdanov, who usually came from Leningrad for such an occasion. They drank Kakhetian, sang Georgian songs together with Lavrentiy, then together with Yakov, and then, getting tipsy, they switched to thieves' songs, which, unlike Georgian ones, everyone present knew.

The next day, Stalin conferred with aviation generals Rychagov, Zhigarev and Smushkevich on plans for the further deployment of airfields in the western regions of the USSR. The construction of the runways was even ahead of schedule, caponiers were dug for aircraft, people lived in tents, but the question arose of storing fuel, bombs, necessary spare parts and many other aviation equipment, which for various reasons did not fit to be stored in the open air or in unequipped warehouses. Including gliders for the planned large-scale airborne operation of the first stage of the Thunderstorm. So far, the pilots have reported that Comrade Stalin's instructions regarding landing gliders have been fulfilled. All of them are removed to hangars and special warehouses, which are strictly guarded. True, they did not report to Stalin that because of this, all aircraft were put out of the hangars, including the hundred-hour routine maintenance that was taking place. Stalin did not react to the problem of providing new airfields with fuel, sometimes supplied by horse-drawn gas tanks, the gasoline from which had to be poured into canisters, and then poured into aircraft through a funnel. It was not known how all this would have to be done in a real combat situation, but the problem of the acute shortage of tankers did not seem to be solved in any way against the backdrop of a sharp increase in the aircraft fleet and airfield network.

Abnormal basing and airfield service conditions led to a sharp increase in the accident rate during training flights, which the aviation commanders did their best to hide from the leader. Stalin had his own sources of information, but not wanting to exacerbate the issue, he exposed it to Rychagov with that gentle reproach that often misled those who did not yet know Comrade Stalin well enough.

But the leader was clearly in a good mood and, after listening to General Rychagov's report on measures to camouflage gliders, he even honored him with the highest encouragement - the word: "Maladets."

Rychagov, encouraged by Stalin's interjections and the word "well done", taking advantage of the fact that at the end of the meeting he was left alone with the leader, completely unexpectedly for Stalin started talking about his missing friend Ivan Proskurov, the former head of the GRU. Comrade Stalin, in surprise, even took the pipe out of his mouth and put it in the ashtray.

Rychagov and Proskurov once served in the same squadron. Once upon a time: it's in Spain. Proskurov, like Rychagov, was a desperate fighter pilot, received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and was personally promoted to general by Stalin directly from senior lieutenants.

Rychagov said that he vouches for Ivan - he is honest, devoted to the cause of the party and personally to "you, Comrade Stalin." There was a misunderstanding and he asked to be sorted out. If Comrade Stalin believes him, Pavel Rychagov, whom he entrusted to head the country's air force, then let him believe that Ivan Proskurov too ...

And he looked into the eyes of the leader with his dashing bright eyes.

Stalin's surprise was caused not only by Rychagov's courage, but rather by the fact that just a week ago (December 17) the leader read Proskurov's testimony, knocked out of the former head of the GRU by "specialists" from the NKVD. Proskurov confessed that he deliberately misled the Central Committee, the government and Comrade Stalin personally with the aim of "a fascist-Trotskyist coup and the elimination of the power of the workers and peasants in the Soviet Union." But he categorically denied that he was transferring military and state secrets of the USSR to foreign intelligence, believing that he would achieve his goal with the help of one disinformation of the leadership.

It looked ridiculous, since it had already become quite clear to the investigation that this was another military conspiracy that had matured in the circles of the top military leadership, which



dragged into it, according to an already formed tradition, the head of the Main Intelligence Directorate.

Proskurov was asked to name his accomplices. The brave pilot, daily beaten to a pulp during interrogations and taken to the cell in an unconscious state, held firm, assuring that he acted alone. Such statements caused only snake smiles among the investigators. Without any doubt, the threads from Proskurov stretched to the General Staff, which was in charge of the GRU, to old friends in aviation and, of course, to someone who led this conspiracy.

Stalin was already tired of the endless conspiracies eternally brewing in the depths of his military apparatus, frustrating his plans, dreams and hopes. He wrote a resolution: "Find out all the participants. I think we need to look at the General Staff. St.".

And then Rychagov assures him that Proskurov, who has practically confessed everything, is an honest man, devoted to the party and the cause of Lenin-Stalin. What is it: political blindness, a false sense of camaraderie, or ... the head of the Air Force department, exhausted by uncertainty, is trying to find out from Stalin himself if his friend Proskurov gave any evidence against him? And what does Stalin himself think about this?

Stalin said his famous "let's look" and released Rychagov, looking at his back until the heavy, oak-trimmed office door closed behind the general ...

On December 23, a meeting of the top leadership of the Red Army opened at the Central House of the Red Army. There were more than 270 people in total. Of course, it was clear to everyone that such a mass meeting of the country's top army leadership would not escape the attention of foreign intelligence, and therefore the meeting, on the one hand, was disguised as a military-theoretical conference, and on the other, was, as it were, a summing up of combat training for 1940 and "development of proposals for its improvement in 1941".

Soviet military science has always been distinguished by cheerfulness and optimism. Back in 1938, at the height of the all-army massacre, the General Staff developed a new plan for the deployment of the Red Army, based on the worst option for the USSR - a war on two fronts: in the east - against Japan, in the west - against a large coalition of states led by Germany, followed by Italy, Poland, Romania, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. According to the analysis carried out then, all opponents of the USSR

taken together, could deploy on both fronts 13,077 guns, 5,775 aircraft and 7,980 tanks. This was ridiculous, since the Soviet Union produced 12,000 guns, more than 5,000 aircraft in 1938 alone, and tank production for the year already accounted for more than half of world tank production. The plan of the General Staff then set the troops the task: from the moment hostilities began, to inflict a decisive defeat on the opponents both in the west and in the east.

The army had many weaknesses, which were told to Stalin by Tukhachevsky and confirmed by Shaposhnikov, who took over the military educational program of the Leader of all peoples. The most terrible vices are congenital, and even more so - hereditary. The current army, no matter how it was cleaned and deformed, was born from the Red Army of the Civil War. And one of the negative consequences of the civil war was that because of it the lessons of the First World War were forgotten, and those who tried to generalize these lessons were placed in such conditions that no one heard them, even if they wanted to.

If the First World War already in its first year and a half clearly demonstrated the fact that the role of the cavalry was already close to zero, then the civil war, on the contrary, gave rise to

monstrous degenerate monster - unprecedented in its size

strategic cavalry. In the absence of fixed fronts and the weak technical base of the opposing armies, the great Russian plains became the most fertile theater for the action of huge masses of cavalry, which history has not seen since the campaigns of Genghis Khan. And the war with Poland further confirmed the idea of the need for large cavalry formations in modern mobile warfare.

Each cavalry corps, led by some legendary figure like Kotovsky, owned huge land plots, serfs under the guise of villages, responsible for supplying the corps with food and fodder, even sugar factories. And everyone dreamed of, if not independently carrying out a world revolution, then, in any case, to be the foremost unit of the "world army of labor."

In the general headquarters of the cavalry, red arrows of deep cavalry raids right up to Paris and Calcutta were enthusiastically drawn on maps, thousands of tons of oats were counted to feed horses and riders, and there was even a theoretical discussion, which (like all discussions in the USSR) was followed by arrests with mortal sentences for sabotage. It was about the need to castrate combat stallions so that they would not be distracted by mares in battle formation. Opponents of this measure argued that stallions, having lost their male stimulus, would also lose the fighting qualities necessary for a cavalry drill horse.

The practical justification for the existence of a cavalry monster has always been the Polish lancers, since no one seriously spoke about the different Hungarian or Romanian hussars even in the cavalry general staff. But the Polish lancers, famous for their valor and combat training, in the recently ended war of the Poles with Hitler and Stalin showed their complete failure, and this served as a death knell for the cavalry, and the subsequent actions of the German tank formations on the western front overwhelmed Stalin's patience, in a rather harsh form who offered the cavalymen to moderate their ardor and ambitions. The cavalry units were disbanded one after another, although this was not an easy task at all. And although the cavalry units were reduced in the period from 1937 to 1940. almost five times, there were still more cavalry in the Red Army than in the rest of the world, including the camel cavalry of the Arab Legion.

During the all-army massacre in 1937-38. The "untouchable" cavalry leaders Voroshilov, Budyonny, Timoshenko and so on before Ogorodnikov did a lot of glorious deeds, ruthlessly throwing under the knife everyone who dared to doubt the unfading value of cavalry in the modern armed forces. In addition to the thousands of officers killed, the activities of the cavalry "lobby" led to the disruption of the program for saturating the army with vehicles, to the disbandment of the mechanized corps.

But more terrible than the cavalry itself was the cavalry spirit of the army leadership. Of the entire civil war, they only remember the dashing pursuit by cavalry lavas of the retreating units of General Denikin in the autumn of 1919, when they flew south, sweeping away the scattered Cossack barriers, and then lived for many years in the hope that they would again be able to lead war horses "along the familiar roads for their beloved people's commissar."

Cavalry prowess had a strong influence on all scenarios for a possible outbreak of war. There were never two opinions in high headquarters: the Soviet Union should always start the war with a sudden, crushing blow, choosing the most favorable military and political moment for this blow.

Therefore, the preamble "if the enemy attacks", even in the conditions of the pre-war USSR, was no longer taken seriously by many. After all, they did not hesitate to announce that little Finland had attacked the Soviet Union. And when no one attacks, then you can declare

"liberation" campaign both in Mongolia and in Poland. You can respond to the call of the people, as in the Baltic States and in Bessarabia. You can act in other, no less effective ways.

It was necessary urgently, so to speak, to "de-cavalry" the army. Even not so much in form as in spirit, since Stalin understood that his internal rejection by the army came precisely from the ideology of the cavalry monster created and fed by Leon Trotsky. Moreover, Shaposhnikov once remarked to him that all the troubles of the winter war with Finland occurred due to the fact that the former "Budenovites" built a war plan on the dashing pursuit of the fleeing Finnish army, using for this purpose, for lack of cavalry, infantry lava.

But in the conditions of sole power, "totalitarian sclerosis", as future historians will note, much (if not all) depended not on how this or that "first marshal" or chief of the general staff sees the future war and his own army, but how all these problems were drawn to Comrade Stalin himself - a man, of course, an outstanding, talented, and in some areas even great, but, unfortunately, illiterate and completely non-military.

The image of a future war was drawn to Stalin by a chain of uprisings in the hostile camp of capitalism (not spontaneous, as Lenin dreamed, but carefully prepared by the Comintern), a campaign by the Red Army to help the rebels where they could not cope on their own, a war with individual capitalist countries (mainly to stimulate uprisings where they have not yet flared up), culminating in the worldwide victory of socialism, which, according to the leader, had already been built in the USSR.

After rapprochement with Hitler, having received the appropriate instructions, the Soviet mass media, interrupting the escalation of war psychosis at a gallop, began unexpectedly, on the same hysterical note, to scream about world peace, about warmongers and about the readiness of the Soviet Union to crush anyone "with little blood on foreign territory" with one indispensable condition: if he is attacked. Although everyone in the Kremlin understood perfectly well that it was worth nothing to provoke an attack on the USSR. It is enough to pick up the phone and order "who should" to fire on some of their own outposts, as happened in the case of Finland. But for the overwhelming majority of people in the country and in the army, who were not privy to Comrade Stalin's refined methods and who took everything at face value, the radio-newspaper cries about peace and "non-aggression" had a corrupting effect. For

there is nothing more corrupting than the dream of eternal peace, which was warned by the first theoretician of barracks socialism, the unforgettable Plato.

Therefore, on the eve of the November holidays of 1940, Stalin summoned one of the youngest secretaries of the Central Committee, Alexander Shcherbakov, who dealt with issues of agitation and propaganda, oversaw TASS, the political propaganda organs of the army and industry. The leader ordered a slight change in the tone of official propaganda, for it became necessary to prepare the country and the army for a major offensive, devastating war. "The Bolsheviks," Stalin explained, pacing around the office behind the silently listening Shcherbakov, "should not be just pacifists who sigh for peace and take up arms only if they are attacked. This is not true. There are times when the Bolsheviks themselves will attack.

"What are these cases?" - the leader asked the question in his own manner and answered it himself:

"We cannot look indifferently at what is happening beyond the Soviet borders when

most of Europe is captured by Germany. The peoples of the world look with hope to the USSR, expecting intervention in European affairs from the world's first country of victorious socialism in order to bring freedom to the enslaved peoples.

Stalin ordered Shcherbakov from now on to build a system of political education based on these theses and secretly prepare the necessary visual propaganda (leaflets, posters, etc.), presenting them to him, Stalin, for approval.

Shcherbakov was a man of exceptional capacity for work and diligence. Two weeks later, the first sketches of propaganda posters were already reported to Stalin for comments and approval.

On one of the posters, done in ominous crimson colors, 80% of the useful area was occupied by a huge, crimson-red head of Lenin against the backdrop of red banners. The leader of the world proletariat had a formidably dead expression on his face, like a pagan god of war, turned by the new religion into the God of the world revolution. At the bottom of the poster, sandwiched between the beard of the leader of the world proletariat and the call: "Under the banner of Lenin, forward to the West!", Red Army soldiers in helmets marched in close formation with bayonets at the ready [62]. They walked in the famous Russian infantry lava, and the head of Ilyich, thanks to the skill of the artist, towered behind them and hovered above them as a terrible symbol of the atheist crusade, a symbol of the new deity of a religion that denies God.

Stalin liked the poster. He ordered it to be printed in a circulation of 5 million copies and sent to all city committees and district committees of the party and to the military registration and enlistment offices in secret packages with the inscription: "Open by special order."

Everything was fine, but not Lenin, but him, would have to lead the troops.

Yes, he had enough knowledge to understand that the cavalry should give way to tanks, he had enough knowledge in the midst of deadly and vile intrigues to save the T-34 tank and the Katyusha rocket launcher, but he well understood how cleverly both the military and engineers use his illiteracy, in order to impose his point of view, as if agreeing with him in everything. "What does it take to really win?" - Stalin asked in one of his speeches in March 1939 and answered: "For this we need three things: the first thing we need is weapons, the second is weapons, the third is more and more weapons." It was brilliant, and the country was flooded with weapons. And Stalin personally dealt with the problem of weapons, giving instructions to the developers of new weapons within the framework of his understanding of the future war, which, no matter how hard he tried to break out of the old dogmas, still seemed to him only in the form of a dashing cavalry pursuit, even on tanks.

So, to the old Leninist slogan "study, study and study military affairs in a real way," Stalin added his own - "arm, arm and arm." However, with such a concentration of not only power, but also all decisions in their own hands, and the hands, to put it mildly, not very professional, it was impossible to avoid huge gaps in the preparation of the country for such a global war, conceived, albeit in stages, but in fact with the whole world. It was impossible to direct and control such a gigantic undertaking alone. In addition to "weapons, weapons and weapons" there were still a huge number of problems that, in order to be solved, had to be identified first. Stalin personally dealt with all the problems associated with tanks, artillery systems, aircraft, battleships, cruisers, submarines, machine guns, machine guns and

rifles.

Like any purely civilian person, Stalin perceived the armament and the picture of the future war as a "visual representation", a kind of chain of endless pictures, in which,

the more powerful one or another type of military equipment looked, the more preferable it was. A battleship, of course, always looked preferable to a frail minesweeper in his eyes, a heavy tank looked better than a snuffy field telephone. In general, everything that could not be effectively represented by the "visual range", i.e. in the picture, passed by the attention of the Father of all nations. And first of all, the basis of military affairs: communications and control. A whole branch of the military was absolutely not interested in Comrade Stalin, precisely that branch of the military, without which normal command and control of troops is simply impossible.

Stalin carried the neglect of communications through the years, crushing cybernetics in the bud as "pseudoscience alien to Marxism" and ensuring the Soviet Union was lagging behind the world for life in the most important branch of military affairs - the system of "command-control-management and communications", missing the beginning of a new era - the era of electronic war.

Almost in the same pen as communications was the military transport service, operating almost 80% with the help of horse-drawn transport, which was also an echo of the great era of "strategic cavalry".

The rear service was in even worse condition, apparently, by its name alone, suggesting something cowardly and shameful. In 1939, speaking at the 18th Party Congress and talking in detail about the growth and development of various branches of the armed forces, Voroshilov nevertheless said a few words with a chuckle about signalmen, but did not mention the rear service at all. Operation Thunderstorm, conceived as a gigantic robbery raid, generally assumed the supply of the army with captured resources.

And in general there is nothing to say about the medical service, which since the time of the civil war has become no better, to say the least. There was no trace of not only field installations for blood transfusion, syringes with morphine and oxygen masks, which were already at the disposal of almost all the armies of the world, but even anti-tetanus drugs and the simplest medical instrument [63].

More than all Stalin's problems, as usual, the problem of personnel was concerned. None of the armed forces at the head has yet fully satisfied him. Besides himself, he did not see anyone who could lead a huge army on such a historical campaign, which was envisaged by Operation Thunderstorm. But he himself was a non-military person, and therefore had only to send into battle.

For this, he ordered to convene a meeting of the highest command staff of the Red Army, so that, having solved all the army problems, at the same time deal with the personnel. Personnel contamination again made itself felt in the People's Commissariat of Defense, and in the General Staff, and in the NKVD. This tormented the leader much more than the problems of the rear and transport of the Red Army in the global game he had conceived, where the future of Russia and its people was again thrown onto the card table.

Marshal Timoshenko opened the meeting with an introductory speech by the People's Commissar of Defense. It was short. Having determined the order of reports and regulations, the People's Commissar gave way to the Chief of the General Staff, General of the Army Meretskov, whose report had a long official title: "Results and tasks of combat training of the ground forces, air force and operational training of senior command personnel." Meretskov began his report with a review of the international situation. "1939 and 1940," he pointed out, "took place in a complex international situation. Most of the peoples of the world have been dragged into a great and difficult war by the imperialists... At a time when the belligerent peoples are suffering immeasurable suffering, our mighty people, under the leadership of the great leader Comrade Stalin, thanks to his wise strategy, continue to remain out of the war and, as before, confidently move towards their goal, improving their material well-being and increasing the power of the armed forces of our country ... "

Describing the war with Finland as an attempt by the imperialists to "test our might and drag us into the war," the chief of the general staff noted with satisfaction that although these repeated attempts were unsuccessful, the Red Army "gained great combat experience in modern warfare."

Emphasizing the offensive nature of the Soviet military doctrine, Meretskov emphasized that "the experience of recent wars, exercises and field trips showed insufficient operational readiness and military culture of the highest command personnel, military, army, front-line and especially aviation headquarters. This issue has not been dealt with before. For many years, there were no instructions for driving large modern formations, for putting them into battle along with tanks and aircraft ... "

Unexpectedly, as if bringing the hushed hall out of its stupor, General Meretskov begins to talk about the dangerous neglect of defense issues in the army. No, he does not dare to utter the word "retreat" which is strictly forbidden to use. He talks about defense, emphasizing that this concept has practically disappeared from the charters, replaced by the vague word "fettering the enemy", since many are simply afraid to even think that they will have to defend themselves.

"Given the experience of the war in the West," the brave Chief of the General Staff says quickly, fearing that Marshal Timoshenko will now stand up and deprive him of his word for propagating bourgeois heresies, "along with preparing for active offensive operations, we need to have an idea and prepare troops for modern defense ".

The General takes a breath, pausing. He knows Stalin's position on this issue, which, "naturally", is fully shared by People's Commissar Timoshenko and almost everyone sitting in the hall, in whose safes there have long been red packages marked: "Open upon receipt of the Thunderstorm signal.

Meretskov realizes that he has gone too far, but continues:

"Modern defense must withstand powerful artillery fire, mass attack of tanks, infantry and air enemy. Therefore, it must be deeply anti-tank and anti-aircraft ... "

Stalin, listening to the speeches of the Chief of the General Staff on a special broadcast in a separate room, winces as if from a toothache. Defense again! These are very dangerous thoughts that have a corrupting effect on the combat mood of the army. No, the post of Chief of the General Staff was clearly not up to Meretskov. He who constantly thinks about defense will not be able to lead a swift offensive ...

But then General Meretskov came to his senses and again switched to "new speech":

"The fighting with the Japanese-Manchus on the Khalkhin Gol River and the war with the White Finns showed the boundless devotion of the fighters, commanders and the entire commanding staff to the socialist Motherland, the party, the government and the great Stalin ...

At present, the government and the party, while providing our army with everything necessary, demand that we be always on alert..."

According to Meretskov himself, having stepped down from the podium, he felt emptiness around him. During the break, many colleagues were even afraid to approach him and, in any case, not to linger around him for a long time.

The meeting continued.

One of the great graces given to us by the Creator is that we do not know anything about our destiny. And even more so, we do not know about our end ...

Very many of those present at the meeting had less than a year to live at best. Of the three main speakers developing the theory of the rapid advance of huge masses of troops and military equipment, two will be shot, and one will be imprisoned.

Many others will meet the same fate, and those who are more lucky will either die in battle or be captured.

The guards will urinate on Meretskov himself, beaten to a pulp, knocking out of him a confession of espionage in favor of England, and Lieutenant General Andrei Smirnov, Inspector General of the Red Army Infantry, who spoke in the debate on his report, is destined to die in October 1941 under no one yet. the famous village of Popovka, where his 18th army will be completely destroyed.

Almost to the same day, with the death of Smirnov, another general speaking in the debate, Yakov Smushkevich, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, will also be shot.

The next speaker will also die in a strange car accident: Deputy Commander of the Moscow Military District, Lieutenant General Ivan Zakharkin.

In just seven months, he will be taken prisoner, and from there to the Gulag, the commander of the 6th army of the Kyiv OVO, Lieutenant General Ivan Muzychenko, who criticizes defensive moods in the army in the debate.

Already on June 26, corps commissar Nikolai Vashugin, a member of the Military Council of the Kiev Special Military District, who told the audience about cases of anti-Soviet propaganda in the troops and other intrigues of foreign intelligence that corrupted discipline, would have to shoot himself.

Captivity and the subsequent prison await the commander of the 4th mechanized corps, General Mikhail Potapov, who advocated in the debate for the creation of even larger tank formations.

The captivity and immortal glory of the biggest traitor in history await the next speaker in the debate - the already familiar commander of the 99th Infantry Division, General Andrei Vlasov.

Trial, dismissal and a large camp term await the commander of the vast Siberian Military District, Lieutenant General Stepan Kalinin, who criticized the defense and recognized only the offensive.

In July 1941, the trial and execution await the next speaker in the debate, General Vladimir Klimovskikh, chief of staff of the Western Special Military District.

In just a couple of months, arrest and execution (in October) await Colonel General Grigory Stern, commander of the Far Eastern Front, who spoke after the Klimovskys.

Arrest and execution await the next speaker, Lieutenant General Nikolai Klich, who is still the head of the artillery of the Far Eastern Front.

A happier death in battle while trying to withdraw the remnants of his defeated 33rd Army from the encirclement awaits the next speaker, Lieutenant General Mikhail Efremov, while commander of the Transcaucasian Military District.

An unprecedented defeat of the parts of the North-Western Front entrusted to him, a miraculous salvation from German captivity and Stalinist retribution, along with eternal shame, await Lieutenant General Fyodor Kuznetsov, who is still commander of the troops of the North Caucasian Military District, who spoke after Efremov.

Arrest and execution await the famous Marshal Grigory Kulik, who spoke after Kuznetsov, a veteran of the 1st Cavalry, Stalin's favorite (at this stage), deputy people's commissar of defense and head of the main artillery department of the Red Army. Not knowing his future, while he is the most famous person in the army, mainly due to tyranny and rudeness, as well as statements like: "Mines are the weapons of a weak coward", "Automatic weapons are the weapons of gangsters and the police."

Captivity and death in a German concentration camp await the next speaker: Lieutenant General Philip Yershakov, Commander of the Urals Military District.

Arrest, bullying and a long prison term await the next speaker: Air Force General Alexander Novikov (future air marshal and twice Hero of the Soviet Union).

But none of them know this yet.

On December 24, the meeting listens to the main report on the topic "The nature of the modern offensive operation." Commander of the Kyiv Special Military District, General of the Army Georgy Zhukov, on the podium. Timoshenko, at every opportunity, molested Stalin, begging him to transfer Zhukov to Moscow, assuring him that this was exactly the person whom Comrade Stalin was looking for to implement plans for creating a "world Commune". Stalin is in no hurry, keeps an eye on Zhukov, studies his dossier, discreetly consults about Zhukov with members of the Politburo, especially with Beria and Mekhlis. Does he drink? Do you want grandmothers? Does he steal? [64] Not involved in anything serious. Is it true that reading and writing is difficult? Is it true that he loves to masturbate?

In his report, Army General Zhukov, without proclaiming any toasts, immediately moved to the essence of the issue under consideration:

"As a result of the widespread introduction of modern technical means in the army, i.e. With the development of the air force, armored formations, mechanization of artillery and motorization of the army, operational art received such powerful factors as speed and impact force. On the basis of these technical means, operational and tactical surprise, maneuverability and range of operations have been significantly increased. The speed of development of operations is achieved mainly

thanks to the sudden, bold and massive use of aviation, airborne troops, tank and motorized formations ... "

Stalin, taking his pipe out of his mouth, ran his hand over his mustache, which was always a sign of complete approval with the leader. Finally, damn it, he heard what he needed without any rassusolivanie. Young man!

"In the conditions of our Western theater of operations," the general of the army rumbled in his low voices, "a major offensive operation with a strategic goal ... should be carried out on a wide front, at least on a scale of 400-450 km.

The power of the first strike must ensure the defeat of at least one third, one second of all enemy forces and bring our forces to such an operational depth from which



a real threat of encirclement of the rest of the enemy forces.

Such an operation will, of course, require the concentration of powerful forces and resources, and I think that such an operation on such a front will require about 85-100 rifle divisions, 4-5 mechanized corps, 2-3 cavalry corps and 30-35 aviation divisions. It goes without saying that such a number of armed forces should be comprehensively equipped with appropriate means of strengthening artillery, tanks accompanied by infantry, engineering troops and appropriate controls ...

Air strikes must be deployed in such a space as to suppress the bulk of enemy aircraft in the airfield-based areas, inflict defeat on it, disrupt the supply of railways and dirt roads, destroy the operational actions of the enemy forces in the rear, paralyzing any attempt to regroup forces ... "

Stalin suddenly found himself applauding the speeches of the commander of the Kyiv district. The gloomy mood that oppressed the leader in the morning (there was an attack of the prostate at night) dissipated. The pain that had been lurking all morning somewhere inside was gone, as if it had never been before.

"Of course, subsequent strikes," General of the Army Zhukov continued to please the leader, "will be much deeper, and if the enemy is not only crushed by the first blow, but defeated, if he is not able to organize resistance on the rear operational lines, he, of course, must be driven until complete annihilation

it is necessary to achieve complete strategic success with one blow.

Then Zhukov switched to more specific and less clear to the leader arguments about the "army offensive operation as a derivative of the front one", which, in Stalin's opinion, could well have been excluded from the report. The army is too small an operational unit for a man of such a magnitude as Comrade Zhukov.

The leader did not listen very attentively and started up only at the final part of the report of the general of the army.

"The surprise of a modern operation," Zhukov concluded his speech, "is one of the decisive factors in victory. Attaching exceptional importance to surprise, all

methods of camouflage and deception of the enemy must be widely introduced into the Red Army.

Camouflage and deception must run like a red thread in the training and education of troops, commanders and staffs. The Red Army in future battles must show

a high class of operational and tactical surprise. The highest command staff and headquarters of higher formations in the near future should perfect their knowledge and skills

on the organization and conduct of a modern offensive operation.

Back in 1921, Mikhail Vasilyevich Frunze, while analyzing the question of a unified military doctrine of the Red Army, wrote that it was necessary to educate our army in the spirit of the greatest activity, to prepare it for

completion of the tasks of the revolution through vigorous, resolutely and boldly carried out offensive operations.

The report made a strong impression not only on Comrade Stalin, who was listening to it on a special broadcast, but also on all those present in the hall. Moreover, those present, unlike Stalin, could see the expression on Zhukov's face when he read out his report. It was impressive. It seemed that the general, right from the rostrum of the meeting, with a wave of his hand, would throw

armies of many millions forward with the achievement of complete surprise. The formidable energy of Zhukov, as it were, poured out into the hall, showing who exactly that "first marshal" was, that he should lead us into battle on the orders of Comrade Stalin, whose absence was so acutely felt in the army after the great leader drove his bankrupt friend Klim from his post Voroshilov. To such a report, as they say, it was "neither add nor subtract." That is why only the most stubborn dared to speak in the debate, and even then in particulars, which, to the essence of what was said, were of no great importance.

With a debate, Zhukov's old rival, Colonel General Stern, who always wants to show himself smarter than everyone else, also got out. Sensing how much depends on this report in the future career of his former subordinate, Stern also began to talk inconsistently about the incorrectness of Zhukov's calculations regarding the tank and artillery saturation of the front sections, slowing down the pace of the offensive, thereby starting another intrigue against Zhukov. The intrigue will be interrupted by Stalin, who in the near future will order Stern to be arrested, tortured and shot.

Filipp Golikov also spoke in the debate. Without criticizing anyone, he told the audience the latest intelligence on the organization and structure of the German mobile doubts.

The report of Army General Georgy Zhukov set the tone for the entire meeting. The overwhelming majority of those present knew very well that this report was written to Zhukov by his district headquarters under the general editorship of Colonel Baghramyan, who headed the operational department. That the report lay for two months in the highest offices of the Kremlin and the People's Commissariat of Defense. That in essence, this is not even a report by Zhukov, but an instruction given by Stalin himself on what specific cases it is necessary to orient the armed forces in the very near future. Therefore, summing up the debate, Zhukov had every reason to state that "there were no fundamental disagreements with my report on the part of those who spoke here."

And it couldn't be. All have long been tuned in line with this report.

On December 26, on the day of the Christmas holiday abolished as superfluous, at a meeting with the report "Air Force in the offensive operation and in the struggle for air supremacy", the head of the Main Directorate of the Red Army Air Force, 29-year-old Lieutenant General of Aviation Pavel Rychagov, speaks at a meeting. Soon - on January 2, 1941 - he will celebrate his thirtieth birthday. He does not know that only four months separate him from arrest and 10 months from execution, along with his beloved wife. He does not know this, and therefore rushes into battle, like a Budyonovsky horse.

"The presence of mobile assets, aviation and airborne assault forces in the army gives a different character to modern operations," he says to listeners excited from Zhukovsky's report. - The characteristic features of a modern offensive operation are: simultaneous impact on the entire operational depth of the enemy; a combination of an attack from the front with actions in the depth of the enemy's location by aviation and airborne assault forces; deep penetration of mobile troops behind enemy lines; simultaneous isolation of strategic reserves from the front by aviation and its disorganization of the rear of the enemy. All this is carried out under the obligatory condition of gaining air supremacy ... "

General Rychagov explains to the audience how to achieve air supremacy by destroying active aviation, the aircraft industry, fuel and material supplies with a sudden strike. How? Yes, it's very simple:

During the period of preparation for an offensive operation, aviation operations must begin in advance.

Everything is clear to everyone.

## Reflection of the imperialist

aggression will begin with a sudden air strike yet

before it starts. And then - a sudden, crushing blow of ground forces.

In conclusion, Rychagov praised the latest aviation order No. 0362, which for the first time in the world began the practice of mass forced recruitment of pilots into aviation, not giving them officer ranks, not paying salaries and forbidding them to marry within three years after promotion to officers (although the term the production itself has not been determined).

Many claim that such a measure was dictated not by the misanthropic views of Stalin and his accomplices towards their people, but by the chronic shortage of parachutes in aviation. In any case, order No. 0362 was perfectly logical. Why, one wonders, does a suicide bomber have a family? To produce widows and orphans, which the state should then take care of? When we destroy the hostile capitalist encirclement, then be fruitful and multiply as much as you like in a communist society...

On December 26, Colonel-General of Tank Troops Dmitry Pavlov, Commander of the Western Special Military District, makes a report on the topic "The use of mechanized formations in a modern offensive operation and the introduction of a mechanized corps into a breakthrough." This is a special report, like the district entrusted to General Pavlov. It was his troops, still in the four armies, grouped on the Bialystok balcony, waiting for the order to a swift throw. If you imagine the entire operation "Thunderstorm" as a deadly spear aimed at the heart of Europe, then the troops of Colonel General Pavlov are the steel tip of this spear. And the commander for this deadly tip is chosen especially.

General Pavlov fought in the First World War. During the Civil War, he served in the cavalry, was the commander of a platoon, squadron, assistant commander of a cavalry regiment. In 1922 he graduated from the Higher Cavalry School, in 1928 - the Military Academy. Frunze, in 1931 - courses at the Military Technical Academy. He was one of the first cavalry commanders who changed his horse to a tank. Participated in battles on the Chinese Eastern Railway, in the Spanish Civil War, in the winter war with the Finns. He headed the Armored Directorate and was considered the most prominent specialist in the use of large armored formations in battle. In June 1940, he was appointed commander of the then Belorussian Military District, which in July was renamed the Western Special Military District. For the war in Spain, despite its more than sad end, Pavlov received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, and Stalin already has an order on the promotion of the forty-four-year-old colonel general to army generals on the table.

Squat, broad-shouldered, breathing volcanic energy, sparkling with the Golden Star of the Hero, three Orders of Lenin and two Orders of the Red Banner of War, Colonel-General Pavlov appeared before those gathered in the front hall of the Central House of Culture as a symbol of power and invincibility. Of course, no one in the hall, including himself, could have imagined in the most nightmare that not even 7 months would pass before Army General Pavlov would be removed from his post and shot on July 22, 1941. Before that, he will wallow at the feet of Marshal Voroshilov, kissing his dusty boots, begging for mercy, when his most powerful strike group will partly run over to the enemy, and partly will be scattered through the endless forests of Belarus, opening the way to Moscow for Guderian's tanks.

But this is yet to come, and the great happiness of not knowing your immediate future hangs over everything.

hall and above the speaker.

Starting with a historical digression, Colonel-General Pavlov quickly moves on to the future:

"A modern tank corps," he reminds the audience, "consists of two tank and one motorized divisions, a motorcycle regiment and reinforcement and maintenance units, a communications battalion, an engineering battalion and an air squadron. The tank division is the main shock force.

The presence in the division of heavy tanks [65], capable of completely free to solve problems, not being afraid of being hit by 3-inch field artillery, and the rest, not afraid of 37-45-mm anti-tank artillery calibers, the presence of flamethrowing tanks capable of burning out the surviving enemy, shows us the power tank division... It is quite clear that a couple of such divisions represent a very formidable force... Thus, the tank corps, which has great shock-penetrating power and technical capabilities, in combination with other mobile arms (motorized infantry, cavalry, aviation), can and should decide the following tasks:

1. Disrupt the concentration and deployment of the enemy's main forces with a sudden strike.
2. Surround and destroy the main enemy grouping.
3. Move to the flank and rear and, together with the troops operating from the front, destroy the opposing enemy.
4. The tank corps is able and obliged to expand tactical success into operational success.

Taking a pointer, Colonel General Pavlov turned to the diagrams hanging behind him.

Stalin leans back in his chair. He does not see the scheme of the German tank group, which Pavlov turned to. Before his eyes shots from the German newsreel. Tank wedges, tanks on the march, rotating gun turrets...

"... After breaking through the second defensive line," he hears the final words of General Pavlov, "the third stage begins, which is characterized by the fact that it requires the most decisive and quick actions to defeat suitable reserves and to destroy the main enemy grouping, on the withdrawal route of which the mechanized corps will firmly stand up and, together with units operating from the front, will destroy the enemy.

All the war is over. The speakers fully laid out the scenario of "Thunderstorm" in their creative understanding.

At this point, the meeting could have been closed if the brave Meretskov had not insisted that, along with the offensive, they would also talk a little about defense. No, not about retreat, God forbid! But in the conditions of a rapid offensive, what can not happen! A defeated enemy in some area will take and deliver a counterattack. You have to be ready for that as well. You cannot live according to a simple scheme: crush, surround, destroy. Timoshenko tried to find out Stalin's opinion, but he shrugged his shoulders: do what you want - your meeting.

But he called Meretskov a "reinsurer". Next in the rank of Stalin's labels was the "alarmist", which was taken into account.

The meeting was supposed to end with large operational-strategic games scheduled for January 2. On December 29, Timoshenko presented to Stalin the procedure for holding games according to a special plan, the first stage of which would be held until January 6, and the second from January 8 to 11. On December 31, Marshal Timoshenko closed the meeting. Assigned to games must

were to linger in Moscow, others - to return to their districts and parts.

A new one, 1941, was coming. The celebration of the New Year was not officially held in the USSR, since this holiday, like Christmas, was considered a "remnant of capitalism." January 1 was an ordinary working day and, if different from others, it was a very large number of latecomers to work, for which a prison term was supposed. But to the credit of Comrade Stalin, it must be said that on January 1 rather liberal customs reigned in the country. It was foolish to go against age-old folk traditions.

Newspapers and radio, making forecasts for the coming year, agreed that "it will be a very happy year." The Pravda newspaper of December 31, 1940 wrote in an editorial: "We can look back at 1940 with a feeling of deep satisfaction ... In 1940, the Party and the Government did a lot to increase the military power of the USSR and the military training of the entire Soviet people. The combat and political training of the personnel of the army and navy has improved tremendously ... in all areas we have achieved tremendous success.

The New Year's Eve article ended with the following words:

"1941 will be the fourth year of the third Stalinist Five-Year Plan. Therefore, as we enter 1941, which will be a year of even more gigantic achievements for our socialist economy, the Soviet people look to the future with joy and full confidence.

What exactly the people are waiting for was hinted at in a poem printed in a somewhat playful design on page 4 (and reprinted by many other newspapers, including the Red Star):

Our every year is victory and struggle

For coal, for the scope of metallurgy!..

Or maybe - to sixteen coats of arms

Other coats of arms will be added!

## Chapter 12

Unlike the USSR, the Third Reich celebrated Christmas week. Many soldiers and sailors received short-term leave to go home. Those who arrived from the eastern borders amazed their relatives with their knowledge of the English language, asking, however, to keep this circumstance secret. After a short rest in the east they would all take part in the final crushing of England.

Hitler's mood never improved. The reports from the fronts were getting worse. The ring of encirclement around Bardia was closed and, despite the boastful statements of Mussolini and his surviving generals, "We are standing in Bardia and will stay there," it was already clear that the fortress would fall.

In Albania, the Greeks continued to drive the Italian army westward, the British agents in the Balkans continued their dirty games and, according to some reports, were already interacting with Stalin's intelligence.

In impotent fury, Hitler ordered Goering to arrange such a New Year's holiday for the Londoners, so that they would start counting their English time from him.

On the night of December 29, having formed up in several waves, German bombers, breaking through all air defense belts, appeared over the English capital, dropping thousands of high-explosive and incendiary bombs over the historical center of London. The capital of the empire had not known such a fire since 1666. A sea of fire raged over the city, devouring palaces and temples. A high-explosive bomb landed in the church of St. Lawrence, built in 1411, in the palace of the Lord Mayor. Hitler ordered that such raids continue every night up to and including January 1st. However, thunderclouds, which poured southward from the polar regions in a wide front, frustrated this plan.

On December 30, Hitler was presented with a translation of Churchill's New Year's radio address to the English people,

"I am sure," said the indomitable English Prime Minister, "that we can consider this formidable year the most glorious, although it was the most difficult year in the long history of England and the British Empire. By the end of 1940, our small ancient island, together with the Commonwealth of Nations and the dominions devoted to it, was able to endure the brunt of the terrible struggle and all the blows of fate. We didn't fall. We didn't flinch. The soul of the English people and the English race proved invincible.

... In the Libyan desert, victory was won, and across the Atlantic Ocean the Great Republic comes closer to fulfilling its duty and more and more comes to our aid.

Hitler silently listened to the translation, without saying a word, and sat down to write New Year's letters. Usually letters, even very secret ones, he dictated, but then he decided to write them himself.

One of the letters was intended for Mussolini.

"Duce! Hitler wrote. "The war itself in the West has been won. A last serious effort must still be made to crush England. In order to determine how we can achieve this, we must weigh the factors that will still separate England from final collapse ... In this battle ... Germany will have to make important decisions for the final offensive in the British Isles ...

We have developed a plan to completely neutralize the English fleet and withdraw it from the British Isles for a sufficient time so that they can land without interference ... "

Further, the Fuhrer touched upon the issues of the duplicity of the Vichy government, which forces him to be on the alert all the time, the naivety of Franco, who refused to cooperate with the Axis powers and found himself face to face with insidious England.

Turning to the situation in the Balkans, the Fuhrer noted with chagrin that "Bulgaria also does not show readiness to bind itself to the tripartite pact and take a clear position in the field of foreign policy. The reason for this is the growing pressure of Soviet Russia. If the king had immediately joined our pact, no one would have dared to exert such pressure on him ... "

Then Hitler moves on to the part for which he sat down to write this letter - to the prospect of relations with the USSR.

"Taking into account the threat of internal conflicts in some Balkan countries, it is necessary to take into account all possible consequences in advance and develop a system of measures that would allow us to avoid them.

I do not foresee any Russian initiative against us as long as Stalin lives and we ourselves do not become victims of any serious setbacks. I would like to add to these general considerations that we currently have very good relations with the USSR. In fact, only two issues still separate us - Finland and Constantinople. With regard to Finland, I do not foresee serious difficulties, because we do not consider Finland as a country entering directly into our sphere of influence, and the only thing we are interested in is that a second war does not break out in this area. In contrast to this, it is by no means in our interests to cede Constantinople to Russia, and Bulgaria to Bolshevism ...

However, first of all," Hitler concludes his letter, "as I have already pointed out, I consider it necessary to try at all costs to weaken the position of the British fleet in the Mediterranean with the help of your fleet, the Duce, and our aviation, since the use of our ground forces in this sector cannot lead to an improvement in the situation. Otherwise, Duce, we cannot make any important decisions until March.

Sincerely yours, Adolf Hitler. Berlin, 31 December 1940."

This letter will be sent to Rome in such a way that Stalin will receive a copy of it before the original reaches Mussolini.

It's time for quick decisions. If this time is missed, Germany will be crushed by the steel ring of superpowers that do not even hide their intentions.

December 29 US President Roosevelt in his New Year's address to the American people stated:

"We must become the great arsenal of democracy. Any country that fights against Hitler, or is at war with him, can count on our help ... I am convinced that the Axis Powers will not win this war. My conviction is based on the latest and most reliable data."

Like this! This is said by the head of state, with which Germany still has normal diplomatic relations. He says this almost every day. His undisguised militancy began to irritate even his own supporters. This means that the war with the United States is inevitable, it has, in fact, already begun.

And the British are already kicking Italy out of the war. On Christmas Eve, Churchill made an open appeal on the radio to the Italian people, very cunningly constructing his speech, inflicting mortal insults on the Duce, Hitler and the entire German people.

"Our armies," the British prime minister broadcast, "are tearing your African army to pieces. Thousands of Italians die, thousands are captured. What is all this for?

Italians, I'll tell you the truth. All this because of one person. One man, only one man, drew the Italian people into a deadly struggle against the British Empire and deprived Italy of the sympathy and friendship of the United States of America... He brought your country to the brink of a terrible catastrophe. This man, contrary to the opinion of the crown and the royal

surnames of Italy, contrary to the pope and all the authority of the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church, contrary to the wishes of the Italian people, who did not seek this war, forced the heirs of ancient Rome to take the side

run wild pagans and barbarians ... Where did the Duce lead his people who trusted him after 18 years of dictatorial power? It stands under the fire of the entire English Empire at sea, in the air, in Africa, and is subjected to energetic counterattacks by the Greek people.

On the other side,

he calls on Attila to come down to him with his hordes of unbridled soldiers and gangs of Gestapo through the Brenner Pass and occupy Italy, oppress the Italian people, for whom he and his Nazi minions have the deepest and most obvious contempt that history has ever recorded. That's where one person has taken you, just one person. With this, I will end my appeal until the day that will surely come when the Italian nation will once again take its fate into its own hands."

What kind of peace, what end of the war can you talk about with a person who publicly uses such expressions in your address, repeating all the conjectures and epithets of Jewish propaganda.

From the East, too, there is no particularly encouraging news. The Soviet press, after a short lull, again began to call on the Red Army somewhere "forward." Where is "forward"? Only, it turns out, to the west. Nowhere else. Information came through England that throughout the second half of December, Stalin was holding some kind of secret meetings with representatives of the military elite of the country. Almost all the commanders of the districts gathered in Moscow. A British source pointed out that only one question was considered at the conference: the method of inflicting a sudden crushing blow on Germany. German intelligence in Moscow could not confirm this, although they knew about the meeting itself. It simply summed up the results of 1940. This is done in every country, and especially in such a militarized one as the Soviet Union.

Hitler was already interested in this question from a purely practical point of view: whether or not he would have time to inflict on Stalin that very sudden blow that, according to many sources, Stalin was preparing against him. But in order to prepare a strike against the USSR, it is still necessary to do gigantic preparatory work, so much so that Moscow does not notice or suspect anything. But it is impossible to deploy 200 divisions on a thousand-kilometer border without anyone noticing. We need an equally large-scale operation to disinform Moscow, with very problematic chances of its successful completion. But there is no other way out.

After signing the plan "Barbarossa" (Directive No. 21), Hitler signed and approved a number of fundamental documents to mislead Moscow. These documents specifically state:

"In the coming weeks, the concentration of troops in the East will increase significantly..."

"... The purpose of camouflage is to hide from the enemy the preparations for Operation Barbarossa. This main goal determines all measures aimed at misleading the enemy. To accomplish this task, it is necessary at the first stage, i.e. until about mid-April, to maintain the uncertainty of information about our intentions that exists at the present time ...



It is necessary to keep the British under the impression that we are continuing to prepare for a landing on a broad front.

"The second phase of disinformation of the enemy begins with the introduction of the most compact schedule for the movement of echelons (May 22). At this point, the efforts of the higher headquarters and other organs involved in disinformation should be directed to an increased extent to

to present the concentration of forces for Operation Barbarossa as a broadly conceived maneuver to mislead the enemy. For this reason, preparations for an attack on England must be especially vigorously pursued. The principle is this: the closer the day of the start of the operation, the cruder the means used to mask our intentions can be ...

It goes without saying that the command will take other steps to mislead the enemy, the expediency of which will be dictated by the situation ... "

The "other steps", which were hinted at in secret documents, was that the Reich Chancellor of Germany and the Fuhrer of the German nation Adolf Hitler personally joined in disinforming the enemy.

Mussolini's letter was, in essence, Hitler's first contribution to the cause of misleading Stalin. The first, but by no means the last.

On the same day, December 31, 1940, Hitler wrote a second letter, this time addressed to Stalin himself.

I take this opportunity, along with New Year's greetings to you personally and to all the people of Soviet Russia, with wishes of success and prosperity, to discuss a number of issues that have already been raised earlier in the course of my conversations with Mr. Molotov and Mr. Dekanozov.

The struggle with England has entered a decisive phase, and I intend not later than the summer of the coming year to decisively put an end to this rather protracted issue by capturing and occupying the heart of the British Empire - the English Isles. I am aware of the complexity of this operation, but I am sure that it will be carried out, because I see no other way to end this war. As I wrote to you earlier [66], the approximately 70 divisions that I am forced to keep in the General Government are being reorganized and trained in an area inaccessible to British aviation and intelligence. That they cause understandable anxiety in you, I understood from conversations with Messrs. Molotov and Dekanozov. Starting around March, these troops will begin to move to the canal coast and the western coast of Norway, and new units will arrive in their place for accelerated training, which I want to warn you about in advance. In addition, I intend to use these troops in the very near future to drive the British out of Greece, for which I will have to lead them through the territories of Romania and Bulgaria. Troops that invade England from Norwegian territory will continue to use transit through Finland. Germany has no interests in Finland and Bulgaria, and when the goals of this war are achieved, I will immediately withdraw my troops from there ...

I especially want to warn you against the following.

The agony of England is accompanied by a feverish search for salvation from its inevitable fate. To this end, they fabricate all sorts of absurd rumors, the main of which

can be roughly divided into two categories. These are rumors about the impending attack of the USSR on Germany and Germany on the USSR. I don't want to draw your attention to the absurdity of such nonsense. However, from the data at my disposal, I can predict that as our invasion of the (British) Isles approaches, the intensity of such rumors will constantly increase, and possibly some fabricated documents will be added to them.

I will be completely frank with you. Some of these rumors are spread by the relevant departments of Germany. The success of our invasion of the islands depends largely on the achievement of tactical surprise, so it is useful to keep Churchill and his entourage somewhat in the dark about the certainty of our plans.

I beg you, do not believe any rumors, as I do with all the rumors about the preparation of your attack on Germany ...

The deterioration of relations between our countries to the level of armed conflict is for the British the only way to salvation, and I assure you that they will continue their efforts in this direction with their inherent cunning and deceit ...

For the final decision on what to do with the bankrupt English inheritance, as well as for strengthening the union of the socialist countries and establishing a new world order, I would very much like to meet with you personally, about which I have already spoken with Messrs. Molotov and Dekanozov.

Unfortunately, the exceptional workload, as you well understand, does not allow me to organize our meeting until the end of the crushing of England. Therefore, I propose to schedule this meeting for the end of June - the beginning of July of the 41st year, and I will be glad if I meet your consent and understanding.

Please accept once again my congratulations on the upcoming New Year, which I hope should be a particularly happy year for our countries, together with the wishes of health and success to you personally.

Sincerely yours, Adolf Hitler. Berlin, 31 December 1940."

During the Christmas and New Year holidays in Berlin, total blackout was observed. The war has already managed to sufficiently change the capital of the Third Reich. Camouflage nets were stretched over the roofs of some houses, sometimes right across the street, blocking the sky for passers-by. Many storefronts and porches were filled with sandbags. On the boulevards and in the parks freshly dug anti-air cracks gaped.

Silence in the American embassy. The ambassador recalled to Washington never returned, and the chargé d'affaires a.i. also has little work to do. Is it possible to go once again to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and convey to some third-rate official another protest of the US government about the increasing cases of attacks by German submarines on American merchant ships in the ocean. The attorney was met with stone faces, rejecting protests on the grounds that American courts openly violate all laws of neutrality, and demanding clarification from the attorney, in turn: is the United States still a neutral or already a belligerent?

Mostly, both sides exchanged icy smiles and meaningful glances, parting with mutual sighs of relief. Thank God that the solicitor arrived, and this time not with a declaration of war or some other vile thing that was daily expected from across the ocean. Thank God, the attorney believed that this time he

managed to dodge direct German questions, but to remind them that his country's patience was not unlimited.

Americans have not been invited to any receptions and receptions for a long time. Long gone are the days when an American naval attache was taken around the bases of German submarines. The accreditation was withdrawn without any explanation and the press attache was expelled from Germany. And only commercial attache Sam Edison Woods, as if nothing had happened, continues his activities. "For, as the great President Monroe said at the beginning of the last century, let this imperfect world perish and fall apart, but our trading operations will continue!" They continue with Germany, and the Germans, like no one else, are interested in them, since even gigantic deliveries from the USSR can no longer satisfy the appetite of the rapidly growing armed forces and the military industry.

In November, Woods had a chance to meet with Hjalmar Schacht himself, the president of the Reichsbank, who told the American that the Führer's insufficiently thought-out policy towards the Jews (the president of the Reichsbank chose the most cautious expressions) had brought the financial system of the Reich to the brink of disaster. Germany is in dire need of a loan. We are talking about a billion dollars with phased repayment over five years. Could Mr. Woods, using his connections with private banks in the States, help get this loan. The American throws up his hands. He will try, but unfortunately the vast majority of US private banks are in Jewish hands. And the Jews, let it be known to Mr. Reich President, have some plans of their own for the immediate future of Germany.

In addition, banks will require loan guarantees. And what guarantees can Germany now provide, whose budget deficit already resembles an abyss leading straight to hell. "Unfortunately, the education of the current chancellor is such that it is difficult for him to explain this. By declaring war on the Jews, the Fuhrer is essentially trying to destroy the existing financial system in the world. And for this he has absolutely insufficient strength, and inevitably he will lose this war with even greater shame for Germany than it was during the time of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

"I hope," Woods asked, "you are not the only one who understands this?"

Schacht declined to answer. On that they parted.

On New Year's Eve, Sam Woods received another letter from his friend, a young aristocrat, in which, among the flyers of various small firms, was a movie ticket.

Returning from the cinema to the embassy, Woods opened the envelope stuffed in his coat pocket in the darkness of the cinema hall. The first thing Woods saw were large red Gothic letters, predatorily lined up in the word "Barbarossa", just below: Directive No. 21. Scanning the documents with his eyes, Woods realized that they were talking about Hitler's plan to attack Russia. Like most Americans of his time, Woods knew very little and had little interest in Soviet Russia. All the efforts of American political scientists and intelligence officers focused on Japan and Germany as the main potential adversaries of the United States in the future. Nevertheless, the very fact that Hitler planned to shift the direction of the next strike aroused undoubted interest.

Woods, as expected, forwarded the documents to the State Department. Secretary of State Hull, after reviewing the contents of the documents received, immediately reported them to the President. By this time, and in addition to Woods, the State Department had relevant information regarding Germany's plans. He also had information about Moscow's plans. President Roosevelt, having received the Barbarossa plan, felt a slight excitement, which happens with a doctor who is gradually convinced of the correct formulation of a complex diagnosis. On

Hull's proposal to inform the Russians about this, Roosevelt decided to wait a bit. The Russians, he heard, have their own, quite good intelligence. Let her get something herself, and from us she will receive only confirmation.

In Switzerland, in his small apartment on the outskirts of Lucerne, Rudolf Rossler failed to properly celebrate Christmas, the only holiday of the year that he truly appreciated. His fellow conspirators in Berlin began the transmission of the longest message in the entire period of their activity. For 48 hours Rossler sat at the receiver, receiving a message transmitted in eight separate blocks. It took him another 12 hours to decipher. As a result, before him lay the plan "Barbarossa" with some related documents. By this time, Rossler, who worked under the patronage of the Swiss secret service, or rather, its head, Brigadier General Roger Masson, established contact with the British. He had no connection with the Russians. Being a staunch anti-fascist, Rossler, of course, also hated the communists, not really distinguishing shades of the same spectrum: red and brown. However, he was well aware that if Hitler was going to attack Russia, then the enemy of the enemy would inevitably turn into a friend.

The Barbarossa plan was transferred to London. As usual: no answer, no hello. Receipt only: accepted.

It was necessary to bring this information to the Russians. So did Roger Masson. Swiss counterintelligence knew perfectly well that a Soviet intelligence network was operating in Geneva. She also knew that this network was filtered by British intelligence, which introduced its officer there. But they did not touch anyone and did not interfere with anyone. Surrounded on all sides by German and Italian troops, Switzerland played a subtle and delicate game with its intelligence and counterintelligence services, which contributed a lot to the collapse of many plans of the Third Reich.

In order to reach the Russians, General Masson advised Rossler to talk to his friend Christian Schneider, also a German, an emigrant who had fled Germany and did not hide his pro-communist views. Rossler really knew him from his arrival in Lucerne and even studied Morse code with Schneider. He only did not know that Schneider was working for Soviet intelligence. But General Masson knew this, and therefore recommended him to Rossler. What neither Masson, nor Rossler, nor Moscow knew was the fact that Schneider was an American agent introduced into the circles of the German anti-fascist emigration with the task of getting into Soviet intelligence.

Rossler met an old acquaintance at the Unter der Egg restaurant on the embankment of Lake Firevaldshet. Wasting no time, he openly asked Schneider if he knew of a way to connect him with the Russians?

"I have intelligence information," Rossler announced bluntly, "that would be extremely useful to the Soviet Union. If they are ready to pay me for it, they can do it later, when I have even more information that is important for them. However, although I do not want to be taken at my word, I am ready to work with them just like that. Absolutely free".

Schneider was silent for a while, lowering his eyes to his plate.

Then he looked up at Rossler, chewed on a piece of meat and said:

"If you do not demand payment from them, they will definitely decide that you are a provocateur. I know them well. Do you have any really important information?"

Rossler decided to go for broke:

"Germany is going to attack Russia."

Distrust flashed in Schneider's eyes: "Are you sure of your source?"

"Absolutely," Rossler replied, then adding that the only condition of his cooperation with the Russians was that he would never reveal his sources of information.

"Such a condition will be the most difficult for Moscow to accept."

This ended the conversation for the time being. Shaking his head doubtfully, Schneider left the restaurant.

Schneider reappeared two weeks later. The anonymity of sources, he admitted, hinders the case. Without naming Rossler, Schneider told about him and his information to the head of the Soviet intelligence group in Geneva, but this made little impression on him. He agreed to forward Rossler's information to the Center, but no one can predict what the reaction will be there. Schneider added that, in the interests of secrecy, Rossler would never have to meet with the leader of the group, nor would he with him [67]. The head of the group for which Schneider worked was Alexander Radolfi, a Hungarian Jew by origin, an NKVD colonel, later known as Sandor Rado. He became famous for a 25-year sentence, which he received after the war on charges of embezzling public money, including money intended for Rossler.

He kept his word. All information was transferred to Moscow.

In addition to the Barbarossa plan, information was transmitted about the concentration of German troops in Romania, about Hitler's plan for Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece. Moscow's reaction was almost instantaneous. Such details can only be known at Hitler's headquarters. Not a single scout is able to find out like this. Stop developing the source immediately. This is an absolutely obvious provocateur. Rado was smart enough to ignore this order, although he temporarily stopped sending information to Moscow. He simply had no other source.

On January 5, when Hitler was listening to Admiral Raeder's report on the latest operations of the surface fleet, a message arrived that the British had captured the fortress of Bardia, which Mussolini assured of its impregnability.

Raeder's report, although it was written in the most streamlined terms, also did not say anything good. The valiant pocket battleship Admiral Scheer (as the admiral put it) crossed from the South Atlantic into the Indian Ocean, intending to operate near the Mozambique Channel. On November 30, having completed a long repair in the car, the heavy cruiser Admiral Hipper went to sea under the command of Captain 1st Rank Meisel. On December 25, the Hipper managed to detect the English convoy, but before he could do anything, the artillery of the English heavy cruiser Berwick fell upon him, calling on the radio other ships of the guard of the convoy. "Hipper" managed to put two shells into the enemy, but, following the instructions, Captain 1st Rank Maisel left the battle.

On New Year's Eve, the battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau made an attempt to break into the Atlantic from Kiel. Unfortunately, this failed, as the ships were caught in a severe storm,

received serious damage and were forced to return to Kiel for repairs.

The Fuhrer listens to the report with a gloomy expression on his face and cuts off the admiral in mid-sentence with a nervous movement of his hand.

He demands from the fleet a sharp increase in activity in order not only to bite the British, but to start a serious struggle with them for possession of the sea. He instructs the fleet to open the way for the army to the British Isles! He expects from him self-sacrifice in the name of victory, as was the case with the ancient Germans, who stopped the Roman hordes!

The admiral is silent, although he has something to object to the Fuhrer, the ancient Germans fought the Romans not at sea, but on land. Or rather, in the forests, where it was impossible to deploy the legions in the correct battle formations.

What will the Fuhrer order to carry out the received order?

And what does England have to do with it if the Kriegsmarine command has already received a copy of the Barbarossa plan. Or are they fooling the fleet again?

Perhaps "Barbarossa" is a fake for the British, so that they relax and finally give the opportunity to carry out the operation "Sea Lion"?

"Raeder! Hitler continued to orate from behind his desk. "England cannot be defeated on land. She must be defeated at sea!"

He demands that ships do not lie in ports in a pile of dead metal. They must always be at sea and fight and fight and fight.

Having calmed down a little, Hitler more clearly explains his plans to the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy. In May, when the Bismarck and Tirpitz enter service, he intends to send a whole squadron into the sea: four battleships and all the heavy cruisers. Their task, as it were, will be the same: to strike at the English shipping. This will force the British to gather their entire fleet into a single fist and throw it into battle with our squadron somewhere in the central Atlantic. And then they will have to withdraw their vaunted fleet from the mother country or destroy their lines of communication. At this point, we will make a triumphant throw across the canal.

The admiral was not at all inspired by the Fuhrer's plan. Because the British battleships and heavy cruisers will go to the Atlantic, this will not increase the landing craft in Germany, nor will there be an increase in the destroyers that were mediocly destroyed in the Norwegian adventure. And if the Fuhrer also intends to attack Russia in addition, then the invaluable supplies of materials will stop, thanks to which it is still possible to complete the construction of ships launched before the war.

Soon word came of the fall of Bardia. On January 2, having completed the encirclement of Bardia, the British bombarded the fortress from land, sea and air. With the Italian fleet completely idle, the English battleship Warspite, a proud veteran of the Battle of Jutland, approached from the sea and began to destroy the fortress with volleys of her fifteen-inch guns. Closer to the shore, the heavy guns of the English monitors roared: Terror, Ladybird and Efis.

Soon, Lieutenant General Bergonzolli realized that his position was hopeless. The bombing destroyed the water supply and destroyed food stores. Disguised in civilian clothes, the general with a handful of volunteers climbed out of the fortress, passing so close to the British positions that he "could smell food from their camp kitchens."

Immediately after the flight of the general, the fortress capitulated. The English flag flew over the governor's palace. 40 thousand Italian soldiers and officers surrendered.

The English official newsreel, quickly delivered to Berlin via Sweden, finally spoiled Hitler's mood.

Nothing to do! We must save our ally. Hitler ordered that a draft directive on assistance to the Italians in the Mediterranean and in Greece be submitted to him immediately for signature.

Ahead of directives, in clouds of sandy dust, dive bombers of the X Air Corps of Lieutenant General Hans-Ferdinand Geisler, who has deployed his headquarters at the San Domingo Hotel in Taormina in Sicily, are already landing on unpaved airfields in Sicily. He has orders to destroy the English Mediterranean Fleet and deprive the British of the ability to transport troops and equipment in the entire area from Gibraltar to Alexandria and Port Said.

The draft directive, which a few days later received the official name Directive No. 22, said: "The situation in the Mediterranean region, where England is acting with superior forces (!) Against our allies, requires rapid German intervention for strategic, political and psychological reasons.

Tripolitania must be held and the collapse and collapse of the Albanian front must be prevented ...  
"

This whole directive breathed some kind of panic, so uncharacteristic of past directives signed by Hitler.

Ribbentrop urgently telegraphed Schulenburg to Moscow:

"Since the beginning of January, large German units have been transferred to Romania through the territory of Hungary.

These troop movements are due to the need to seriously address the question of the complete expulsion of the British from all Greek territory.

As regards the size of the German troops, for the time being it is desirable to continue to give evasive answers to this question.

Ribbentrop".

The instructions from Berlin were very useful to Count Schulenburg when, on the morning of January 10, 1941, he went to the building of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to sign with Molotov another secret protocol on Lithuania, which since the times of joint annexations, everyone could not finally divide. The text of the protocol under the heading "Top Secret!" was finally agreed by 10 January and read:

"The German Ambassador Count Schulenburg, Plenipotentiary Representative of the Government of the German Empire, on the one hand, and Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR V. M. Molotov, Plenipotentiary Representative of the Government of the USSR, on the other hand, agreed as follows:

1. The Government of the German Empire renounces its claims to the strip of Lithuanian territory mentioned in the Secret Additional Protocol of September 28, 1939 and marked on the map attached to this Protocol.
2. The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is prepared to compensate the Government of the German Empire for the territory referred to in Article 1 of this Protocol by paying Germany 7,500,000 gold dollars or 31,937,500 marks...
3. This protocol is drawn up in two originals, in German and Russian each, and comes into force immediately after its signing.

For the German government Schulenburg

By authorization of the Government of the USSR V. Molotov "

The new Economic Agreement signed on the same day took the subject of a short conversation between Molotov and Schulenburg in a completely different direction, and both sides did not say a single word about the German troops in Romania.

In addition to the secret protocol, Schulenburg and Molotov also signed an agreement on the state border. They drank a glass of champagne to celebrate, took pictures with their delegations and advisers, making absolutely no secret of what happened.

In Pravda, which came out the next day, January 11, on the front page under the heading "Another victory for Soviet foreign policy", a photograph of smiling Schulenburg and Molotov was placed at the time of their signing an agreement on the state border.

On the same page was also placed the "Communique on the conclusion of the Economic Agreement between the USSR and Germany." The communiqué ended with a cheerful phrase to the effect that "all economic questions, including those that have arisen

in connection with the accession of new territories to the USSR, are allowed in accordance with the interests of both countries.

With the same enthusiasm, the Soviet press reported on the success of the German-Soviet Friendship Festival. Comrade Stalin personally did not participate in the next festival of Soviet-Nazi friendship, since he was busy with much more important matters. The results of the December meeting of the top command staff of the army were summed up by holding a series of operational-strategic games.

The games were held in three stages, at each of which the participants, in accordance with the tasks and input received, made decisions, executed directives, combat orders, operational reports and other documents in writing. In the space from the Baltic to the Black Seas, front-line and army formations operated, their deployment and organization openly aimed at the west.

The game participants were organizationally divided into "Eastern" and "Western". Commanded by "Eastern" Colonel-General of Tank Forces Dmitry Pavlov. His chief of staff was Lieutenant General Klenov, the head of the operational department of the headquarters -



Major General Klimovskikh, and Rychagov himself commanded the aircraft of the Vostochny.

At the disposal of the "Eastern", which at the first stage of the game were considered the North-Western Front and were supposed to deliver the most coveted blow to East Prussia, five combined arms armies, four mechanized corps consisting of 10 tank divisions, one cavalry corps, a separate rifle corps and 80 air regiments. The strike of the grouping was supported by the Baltic Fleet, commanded by Rear Admiral Alafuzov.

The "Western" was commanded by General of the Army Zhukov, and his chief of staff was a former military attache in Berlin, then commander, and now Lieutenant General Purkaev.

The forces of the "Western", as always, were much weaker and consisted of three combined arms armies of one mechanized corps, one tank, one cavalry division and one reserve infantry division.

The actions of the "Western" were supported by the formation of the fleet, commanded by the young Rear Admiral Golovko.

Aviation at the "Western" was commanded by General Zhigarev, who was soon destined to replace the arrested Rychagov [68].

As expected, the rapid advance of the "Eastern" on Koenigsberg and Warsaw developed almost without hindrance. Crumpled and surrounded by the "Western", which was also called "blue", quickly ending organized resistance, did not even have time to roll back to new lines, as they fell into the steel pincers of the tank corps of the "Eastern", rightly referred to as "red".

Proud Zhukov went red spots. He was not used to losing and, in his usual manner, expressed claims to Meretskov regarding such a sharp inequality of forces, favorable conditions for the "red" and introductory, fettering the initiative of the "blue", who could not even maneuver their own troops in their operational rear. One had only to think about how the necessary bridge turned out to be blown up, the railway was put out of action, the power plant was destroyed, etc.

Okay, agrees Meretskov. He allowed the Blues to add two more armies, one tank corps, and slightly soften the introductory lines of communications and communications.

But for the "Reds", however, the main thing remains: surprise and one and a half (instead of triple) superiority in forces.

The main thing: suddenness. The suddenness of an attack always has a stunning effect, giving rise to a whole chain of catastrophes, which, in turn, multiply more and more catastrophes. A sudden air strike that destroyed the "blue" aircraft at the airfields makes their troops defenseless from air strikes, forcing them to roll back from the border, leaving the advancing "red" thousands of tons of ammunition, fuel and other supplies. Border airfields are thrown, which immediately capture and begin to use the enemy's air forces, which allows the aviation of the "red" ("eastern") to operate even deeper in the territory of the "blue".

However, the rapid transfer of troops from the strategic reserve allowed the Blues to stop the Reds' breakthrough and strike at the flank of their grouping in East Prussia. Fierce battles ensued: the rush of the "Reds" to Warsaw was stopped. The front in East Prussia has stabilized. The advancing failed to enter the operational space, crushing and surrounding the "Western".

Pavlov reacted nervously: "You should add five more tank divisions to him!"

Timoshenko agreed with him. The composition of the forces of the opposing sides in the strategic game is agreed and approved in advance. Any improvisations on the go are simply inappropriate.

Instead of answering, Meretskov opened the folder and pulled out "Summary No. 8", compiled by the corrosive and stubborn Lieutenant Colonel Rookie.

Timoshenko, Zhukov, Pavlov and many other participants in the game received this report, but due to lack of time in preparing and holding a meeting of the highest command staff, they did not have time to really work it out.

Pavlov expressed the opinion that this is some kind of misinformation. And he is very surprised that it comes from the GRU.

Timoshenko, looking through the documents, drew attention to the absence of Golikov's approval signature.

Meretskov explained that the report was reported to him personally in the presence of Golikov and Vasilevsky. And he tends to believe this report more than many other sources.

Timoshenko, of course, asked if this report was sent to Stalin and other members of the Politburo?

Meretskov replied that, of course, she had been sent. And there was no reaction from the Kremlin. By the way, the mailing shows that it was also sent to Timoshenko. Why did this document surprise him today?

Timoshenko said nothing.

Zhukov sat at the table and carefully read the summary, from time to time raising his glasses to his forehead and shaking his head.

110 divisions, 11 of them armored!

And Meretskov was suddenly seized with inspiration.

He suggested, solely for the sake of working out a theoretical option, to take as a basis the composition of the forces of the parties indicated in "Summary No. 8", and slightly change the conditions of the games. Transfer the surprise to the "western" ("blue") and see what happens.

Timoshenko again tried to object, but Meretskov was unexpectedly supported by Zhukov, who sensed in this variation an opportunity to once again demonstrate his offensive capabilities. And as a matter of fact, if we are talking about games, does it matter where to demonstrate them: from the west or from the east. That's why games exist to play and explore the most incredible options that in real life may never exist.

The blow of the "Western", led by Zhukov and Purkaev, turned out to be terrible.

Having broken through the "eastern" front in several places, Zhukov's tanks rushed deep into enemy territory, sweeping away everything in their path.

Having no right to retreat, units of the "Eastern" ("Reds"), having taken up a tough defense, quickly fell into the environment and their position became hopeless. The catastrophe in the north and in the center did not allow the southern flank of the "eastern" to carry out the planned counteroffensive.

To save the situation, Pavlov had to urgently withdraw his troops, but without having

there was no plan for a retreat, and both he and the mediators clearly saw that the retreat would instantly turn into chaos and a disorderly flight.

The game was quickly abandoned.

A painful feeling gripped all the participants. Such a feeling occurs among the doomed, to whom a miraculous oracle revealed for a moment the secret of their future fate [69].

Upon learning of this game, Stalin was furious.

Having called the participants of the games together with Timoshenko and Meretskov to the Kremlin, the leader demanded an explanation.

As usual, everything was blamed on Meretskov, since the initiative for this disgrace came from right from him.

- What is the reason for the unsuccessful actions, and then the defeat of the "Reds"? Stalin asked in a tone that did not bode well.

Colonel-General Pavlov tried to laugh it off:

"It happens in games, Comrade Stalin. That's what she is a game for.

However, Stalin did not want to listen to any jokes. He remarked to Pavlov that he could not find the right solutions during the game and set his troops up for defeat.

Pavlov began to object that he had been subjected to a sudden blow. And these questions have never been worked out before, either theoretically, let alone practically. And he was attacked by some fantastic forces, from the ceiling.

The menacing gaze of the leader stared at Army General Meretskov.

- Based on what data did you conduct the game? the leader asked. - Why did the Blues get such an advantage over the Reds? Where do you get such a balance of power?

Meretskov showed Stalin "Summary No. 8" by Lieutenant Colonel Rookie.

- What is this? - With a strong Georgian accent, Stalin demanded clarifications, very reminiscent of a person who is being fooled, taking for a fool. Everyone understood that they were risking their heads and only wanted to get out of the situation safely for themselves. All eyes were focused on General Golikov, who was also present at the terrible "dismantling of the strategic game in the presence of the leaders of the party and government."

Golikov, without a shadow of confusion, reported to Comrade Stalin about his fierce struggle with the head (or rather, "acting head") of the GRU information department, Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets, who turned out to be too greedy for disinformation thrown up from all sides.

Further, Golikov told the leader and all those present how the enraged lieutenant colonel demanded a personal report to the chief of the general staff and how they were received together by Meretskov and Vasilevsky, who found the report quite real and authorized its distribution to the troops, although this had already been done by the recruit without permission and his , Golikova, signatures.

Stalin, after listening to Golikov, was silent.

Silent, of course, and all the others, watching with watchful eyes as the leader leisurely walks around the office.

Finally, Stalin stopped, went to the wall first-aid kit, poured some drops into a small cup, drank them and, turning to the sitting marshals and generals, said:

- Comrade Timoshenko asked to appoint Comrade Zhukov as Chief of the General Staff. Let's agree.

The silence turned into dead silence.

Meretskov and Zhukov equally dead.

For the first, this meant removal from office with unpredictable consequences.

For the second, this meant taking up a position where he absolutely did not understand anything, which could also lead to unpredictable consequences.

Apparently, Zhukov's speech at the Meeting, as well as his actions in the game, both on the side of the Blues and on the side of the Reds, made a strong impression on Stalin.

Stopping Zhukov, who was trying to object, with a wave of his hand, Stalin continued: "The Politburo decided to dismiss Meretskov from the post of Chief of the General Staff and to replace him

nominate you."

Without a doubt, Comrade Stalin was such a great man that it is almost impossible for mere mortals to understand some of the motivations for his decisions! After all, he was considering the project of appointing Zhukov as People's Commissar of Defense with the elimination of Marshal Timoshenko, who had already irritated him with his stupidity. And again appoint Marshal Shaposhnikov as chief of the general staff, hoping that Shaposhnikov's high education and vast staff experience could compensate for Zhukov's illiteracy.

And yet, right at a meeting in the Kremlin on January 12, 1941, Stalin removed Meretskov from his post and appointed Zhukov precisely the chief of the General Staff [70].

By this time, the type of so-called universal professional leader capable of heading any institution entrusted to him had already been formed in the USSR. Yesterday he could be the director of the hospital, tomorrow - the directors of the conservatory, the day after tomorrow - the editor-in-chief of the central newspaper. Administration everywhere followed a common pattern and no major problems arose. But even in Stalin's Russia, such a person could not be appointed to a position that required not administrative experience, but deep professional training. In other words, he could be the director of the hospital, but not the leading surgeon, the director of the conservatory, but not the leading conductor, etc. General Zhukov would have coped with the post of People's Commissar of Defense. Moreover, he would be no worse than his predecessors in this post: Voroshilov and Timoshenko. But in the post of Chief of the General Staff - a purely professorial, academic position - he instantly reached the limit of his complete incompetence [71].

As Hitler had hoped, Stalin received his letter along with the Fuhrer's letter to Mussolini. In addition, Stalin also received a copy of Churchill's letter to General Wavell, the commander-in-chief of the British troops in Africa and the Middle East, which, in particular, said:

"We have a lot of detailed information indicating that even before the end of the month large transfers of troops will begin through Bulgaria to the Greek border, the final

the purpose of which is an attack on Thessaloniki. Apparently, until mid-February, no more than one or two tank divisions, one motorized division, about 180 dive bombers and a few airborne units will be able to cross the Bulgarian-Greek border ... The defeat of Greece will overshadow the victories we won in Libya ... Therefore, you must subordinate your plans to the more important interests that are now at stake ... "

The breakdown is interesting. If the Germans invade Greece and win by throwing the British into the sea, much will become clear from their behavior in, say, Romania. Will they withdraw troops from there or not?

If the joint forces of the British and Greeks win, then British troops may be on the border of the USSR. Curious! And then the British will definitely come out into the zone of the Turkish straits.

So far, there are no German troops in Bulgaria, and Hitler can be reminded of some of our claims.

On January 13, 1941, Pravda published a TASS Statement, which stated: "A message is being circulated in the foreign press, citing some circles in Bulgaria as a source of information, that a certain part of the German troops has already been transferred to Bulgaria, that the transfer of the latter to Bulgaria continues with the knowledge and the consent of the USSR that the USSR responded to the request of the Bulgarian government for the passage of German troops into Bulgaria consent."

With such unpretentious methods of a petty provocateur, Stalin probed Berlin.

TASS was further authorized to state the following:

"1. If there really are German troops in Bulgaria, and if their further transfer to Bulgaria really takes place, then all this takes place without the knowledge and consent of the USSR, the German side never raised the question of the presence or transfer of German troops to Bulgaria before the USSR.

References to "foreign press" and "certain circles in Bulgaria" - this was a typical Stalinist method of throwing pebbles over the fence without expecting a boulder to come back.

But in Berlin, they have already got used to such subtle methods of Moscow and have learned to react to it, using an almost Soviet "new speech".

"German Information Bureau on the TASS statement.

January 14, 1941

In view of the large number of rumors ... regarding the alleged transfer of German troops to Bulgaria, Berlin political circles say that there is nothing surprising in the fact that the Russian official TASS agency considered it their duty to publish a refutation in connection with this message ... "

The Germans did not understand the Stalinist move, or understood, but pretended to be fools. Stalin became

ponder your next step in the dark Balkan labyrinth.

On January 14, 1941, Stalin endorsed the order on the appointment of Zhukov as Chief of the General Staff and on the movements in connection with this appointment.

"Top Secret

Decree of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks

January 14, 1941

On the Chief of the General Staff and Commander of the Military Districts

To improve the training of troops of the districts and armies, approve the appointments:

1. Chief of the General Staff and Deputy People's Commissar of Defense - General of the Army Zhukov Georgy Konstantinovich;
2. Deputy People's Commissar of Defense for combat training - Army General Meretskov Kirill Afanasyevich ... "

At the next report, Philip Golikov mentioned the Barbarossa plan received from an unknown source in Switzerland.

Stalin sighed: "What is the source?"

Golikov explained that Colonel Rado was working with this source. Where he found it and so on is yet to be clarified. The source was codenamed "Lucy".

The fact that the British would multiply their provocations through neutral countries could be predicted. But the fact that they would go to the fabrication of Hitler's own directives was unexpected and doubtful. Stalin asked Golikov what he thought about this?

Golikov replied that no one had seen photocopies of the documents, and the texts, in principle, were not difficult to come up with. The war is tied to the roads and whoever attacked the USSR will all be forced to act in approximately the same way. It is enough to take a map with the actions of, say, the same Napoleon, and here is a plan of action for you on the Brest-Moscow line. Moreover, the head of the GRU dared to remark, almost no new roads have been built since then. And the old ones got even worse.

For some reason, this remark of Golikov put the leader in a good mood: "Then we will build roads," he said. "Good darogs, comrade Golikov."

In addition, the intelligence chief continued, it could very well be a document from the archives of the German General Staff, which fell into the hands of the British after the First World War, slightly

refurbished and dated as modern. In any case, until photocopies of the documents themselves are received, it is too early to talk about this. In this direction, they are already working in different countries, and if such a document was indeed signed by Hitler, then this will become known for sure and very soon.

So far, we can say for sure that Germany is not preparing for a war with the USSR. It is impossible to prepare for war with Russia, Comrade Stalin, without taking care of winter uniforms for the army. Many of those still serving in the Wehrmacht probably did not forget how they froze to death in Ukraine in the winter of 1918. Therefore, if there is a plan to attack us, its implementation should have begun with the sewing of winter uniforms for the army. And it is absolutely impossible to do this unnoticed. First of all, a massive slaughter of sheep is needed to sew several million sheepskin coats. But even, let's say that the Germans managed to do all this unnoticed. All the same, such an event will inevitably lead to a sharp decline in lamb prices throughout the country in the conditions of the German economy. But this is already completely impossible to hide.

Stalin was very pleased with the report of the head of the GRU and released Golikov, honoring him with a handshake and escorting him to the door of the office. Despite these supreme displays of Stalinist courtesy, Golikov left puzzled. The leader did not tell him what to do with the author of "Summary No. 8" Lieutenant Colonel Rookie.

Even the day before, during the analysis of strategic games, Golikov noticed that Stalin did not react in any way to his, Golikov, report on the head of the information department and his blatant arbitrariness, capable of provoking a war. Apparently, Stalin considered Meretskov the main culprit of this whole affair and, having removed him from the post of chief of the General Staff, decided not to punish ordinary performers. Just in case, on his way to the Kremlin, Golikov prepared a report on the removal of the Rookie from his post and putting him on trial "for unauthorized actions that could lead to grave consequences." But since Stalin, contrary to the expectations of the chief of the GRU, did not say a word about Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets and his "Summary No. 8", Golikov prudently decided not to give the report a go for the time being. Stalin himself will remember this, then the report will always be ready.

Returning to his room, Golikov called the Rookie. I gave him the text of the Barbarossa plan, data from Geneva and ordered all this to be analyzed and reported. There was no doubt what answer the lieutenant colonel would give.

Intelligence of the NKVD also pleased the leader. Lost connections on the territory of Germany, destroyed by the enemy of the people Yezhov, are being restored. The head of the INO NKVD, Fitin, reported that immediately after the New Year, NKVD resident Alexander Korotkov, acting under documents in the name of Alexander Erdberg, left for Germany, where on January 7 he met with the "Corsican", who informed him that conviction was growing in the aristocratic and intelligent circles of Germany that Germany will lose this war. President Roosevelt's "garden hose" shocked these circles, who considered such a statement by the American president a direct declaration of war on the Nazi regime. The era of high-profile victories of the Wehrmacht is over, a protracted war has begun, which everyone was so afraid of, and therefore opposition to Hitler is growing not only in these initially cosmopolitan circles, but also in the army. In addition to everything, there is a persistent rumor in Berlin that Hitler decided to attack the USSR. Then it's really over. However, the "Corsican" himself is inclined to treat such a rumor, despite its obvious nonsense, with a certain caution. His informant, Harro Schulze-Boysen, who served at the main headquarters of the Luftwaffe, said that they had been ordered to start reconnaissance flights on a large scale over Soviet territory in order to photograph the entire border strip of the USSR. Having an agent at the Luftwaffe headquarters would be very good, but there is no evidence yet that Schulze-Boysen is not a provocateur.

This man belongs to the flower of the German aristocracy.

Great-nephew of the famous Grand Admiral Tirpitz, married to a relative of Prince von Eulenburg. In his student years, during the Weimar Republic, he published the magazine "Der Gegner" ("The Opponent"), which was anti-government in nature, for which he was once arrested. He has a sharply negative attitude towards Hitlerism. Korotkov approached Schulze-Boysen directly and got to know him better. The aristocrat indignantly refused the offered money, believing that his risk was justified "if it contributes to the coming fall of fascism."

"If he doesn't take money," Stalin said, "it means he's a provocateur. Only provocateurs do not take money. Decent people always need money."

Struck by the iron logic of the leader, General Fitin fell silent, looking inquiringly at Stalin, then at Beria.

- We gave him the nickname "Foreman", - the chief of the NKVD continued the report, - if he is a provocateur, then it is also interesting - what they want us to believe. Korotkov was told to be more careful with him. Officer, aristocrat, grandson of Tirpitz. Why would he work with us? - Stalin nodded favorably, making it clear that he agreed with the arguments of the chief of the secret police.

Already around midnight, having released Merkulov and Fitin, Stalin was left alone with Lavrenty Beria. There were several questions to be worked out, the details of which no one else was supposed to know. To Stalin's surprise, Beria again began talking about Schulz-Boysen. It turns out, among other things, the grandson of Admiral Tirpitz said that secret information from the USSR was flowing into the Luftwaffe headquarters. In particular, the Germans know almost everything about the airfield network throughout the European part of the Union, the type and number of aircraft based at a particular airfield, and many other generalized information that can only be leaked from the Air Force Headquarters.

- Is that how? Stalin took the pipe out of his mouth and put it on the table. - Aviation has always produced traitors and continues to do so.

The leader asks Beria what new testimony did he manage to get from the former General Proskurov?

Beria nods in understanding. But Proskurov is a tough nut to crack. He says whatever he wants about himself, admits everything. Two deaths cannot happen, but one cannot be avoided. And silent about others. Doesn't name any names.

- Beat, beat and beat! - prompts the leader, who always suspects his people's commissars of internal affairs of excessive liberalism.

An expression of resentment appears on Beria's face. That he is taught like a schoolboy.

- And family. After all, he has a family, - prompts the leader.

After a pause, Stalin asks Beria how the measures that the Central Committee considered expedient to carry out with Polish prisoners of war are going?

This question arose as early as the beginning of 1940. The opinion was expressed: to shove the rank and file on the islands of the Gulag, to shoot the officers.

By order of Stalin, on March 5, 1940 (that is, to the day 13 years before the death of the leader himself), Beria presented a document to the Politburo proposing to sentence all 15,000 Polish



officers to be shot under a simplified judicial procedure - without charging the accused and without reading the sentence to him [72]. Stalin endorsed this document, forcing all members of the Politburo from Voroshilov to Kalinin to do the same.

From that moment, in the three camps where the Poles were kept, measures began for their mass extermination [73].

Beria proudly reported to the leader that out of 15,000 people, about 80% had already been liquidated. The performers work almost around the clock, because in the interests of secrecy, each Pole is actually shot individually.

However, the reported figures did not make much of an impression on the leader. Taking note of the report of the chief of the NKVD, the leader reproached him for the wrong organization of work, since they were going so slowly.

Beria felt stung by the leader's unfair reproaches. The work is coming to an end, he reported to Stalin with resentment in his voice, and it will be completed no later than the first quarter of this year.

Stalin sighed sadly. The work is just beginning, he explained to the chief of the NKVD. And it will end very soon. At least 300,000 Poles must be liquidated. In parallel with them, it is necessary to liquidate almost the same number of Balts, Romanians, and in the future - Germans, Hungarians, Belgians, Dutch, French. It is impossible to build a new society without liquidating the old one. And what is the liquidation of the old society? - Stalin asked a question to the silent Beria and, as always, answered this question himself.

The liquidation of the old society is not only the liquidation of its structures, social and industrial relations, customs and way of life. This is primarily the elimination of people who lived in this society. If we want to build a new society, we must physically destroy those who remember the old society. Ilyich considered the "stopping of the guillotine" as the main reason for the defeat of the French Revolution. As soon as the guillotine stopped, he argued, the revolution perished.

We took into account the mistakes of the past, the leader continued, walking around the office past the pale Beria, who was sitting at the conference table, all classes alien to our society must and will be destroyed. Therefore, it is fundamentally wrong, Comrade Beria, to assume that your work will be completed in the first quarter of this year. However, your work may end earlier if you do not correctly understand the tasks before you.

When Beria returned home, his wife Nina and son Sergo noticed his pallor and trembling hands. Looking into the horror-filled eyes of his wife, Beria said: "Probably, I will soon be removed from my post." At times, even it was difficult for him to organically fit into Comrade Stalin's global plans.

On January 10, 1941, a call from Washington informed Churchill that the personal envoy of the President of the United States, Harry Hopkins, was arriving in London. The whole of America, and therefore the whole world, knew about the Hopkins mission. The day before, at a press conference, journalists literally clung to Roosevelt, trying to find out the reason for Hopkins' trip. The newspapers published the following transcript:

"Question: Is Mr. Hopkins on any special mission, Mr. President?

Answer: Not at all.

Question: Has he been assigned any rank?

President: Oh no.

Question: Mr. President, is it safe to say that Mr. Hopkins will not be appointed as the new ambassador?

President: As you know, Harry is not in good health for this job...

Question: Will anyone accompany Mr. Hopkins?

President: No, and he will not have any powers.

Question: But will he be given any specific assignment?

President: No. You will not be able to fish out anything interesting. (General laughter.)

When Churchill was informed that Harry Hopkins was going to visit him, the prime minister asked in bewilderment: "Who is this?" When the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary, Brendan Bracken, explained to Churchill who Hopkins was, the Prime Minister immediately ordered "all the red carpets that had survived the bombings be laid out in front of him."

Although the President tried to assure the public that Hopkins had no assignments, he gave his friend before leaving something like a letter of recommendation that read: as my personal representative. Please also send a similar message to His Majesty King George VI.

Naturally, you will tell our government anything that will come to your attention in the course of your mission and that, from your point of view, will serve the most important interests of the United States.

Wishing you all the best for the success of your mission, I remain sincerely devoted to you, Franklin D. Roosevelt."

But the most important message Hopkins had to convey orally. Having met with Churchill and, with purely American spontaneity, interrupting the protocol part, he leaned towards the prime minister and quietly but distinctly said: "The President has firmly decided that we must win the war together. Let there be no doubt about this. He sent me here to inform you that he will support you at any cost and by any means, whatever the cost to him personally. There is no such thing in the world that he will not do, if only it is within the limits of human strength.

## Chapter 13

The German press reacted nervously to Hopkins' visit to London. The newspapers wrote that Hopkins came to "trade the remnants of the British Empire for another batch of rusty American scrap metal and the form of World War I destroyers."

English leaflets continued to rain down on Germany, predicting Germany's imminent end and offering to overthrow Hitler and surrender before it was too late.

German leaflets, also liberally dropped over England, predicted the imminent end of the British Empire and its "greedy and predatory mother country", when German troops, as soon as the weather cleared, would land on the islands.

In Hitler's personal cinema, a newsreel of the Luftwaffe attack on the British fleet in the Mediterranean was shown, cleverly assembled from English and German materials.

Ju-87 dive bombers - Stukas - with a howl and roar attacked the newest English aircraft carrier *Illustrious*, leading a convoy of transports to Malta and Piraeus. The aircraft carrier engulfed in flames, covered with water columns of close explosions of air bombs, really seems doomed. The cheerful and solemn voice of the announcer announces its sinking. Another great victory for the Luftwaffe! On the same day, January 10, the announcer adds, another English aircraft carrier *Ark-Royal* was sunk in another battle. The dominance of the British at sea has come to an end.

Hitler allowed the footage to be used in the weekly film magazine *Die Vohe Rundschau*. The people were already hungry for some high-profile combat episodes proving the invincibility of German weapons. But the Fuhrer's heart was not very cheerful. He knew that none of the British aircraft carriers had been sunk. The *Illustrious*, although it received several direct hits from aerial bombs, made it safely to Malta, and the *Ark Royal*, as intelligence found out, was not attacked at all. But in three days of operations over the Mediterranean, the 10th Air Corps lost 27 aircraft. Most of the pilots were captured by

the English.

On January 17, the Soviet ambassador Dekanozov appeared at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and presented a memorandum with the following content: "According to reports, there are a large number of German troops in Romania, who are currently preparing to enter Bulgaria, with their ultimate goal of occupying Bulgaria, Greece and the straits ...

In view of all this, the Soviet Government considers it its duty to warn that it will consider the appearance of any foreign armed forces on the territory of Bulgaria and the Straits as a violation of the security interests of the USSR. The Soviet government cannot be indifferent to events that threaten the security of the USSR.

Weizsäcker, who received Dekanozov, after listening to the memorandum, asked how seriously he should react to such formidable statements by Moscow?

With full seriousness, said Dekanozov.

On January 22, Weizsacker received Dekanozov and verbally informed the Soviet ambassador of the answer to his statement of January 17, and then handed him the text drawn up in the form of a memorandum.

"We are confident, he said, that our plans serve the interests of the USSR, which, no doubt, is also against Britain gaining a foothold in these areas."

A little later, Schulenburg's dispatch from Moscow arrived, in which the ambassador informed about Molotov's reaction to the memorandum.

Almost simultaneously with Schulenburg's telegram, another major catastrophe was reported that had befallen the Italian army. The British took the beautifully fortified fortress of Tobruk. The fortress garrison surrendered virtually without a fight. "The police in Tel Aviv fought us better than the Italians in Tobruk," one Australian soldier was quoted around the world by news agencies.

On the same day, the final expulsion of the Italians from Abyssinia (Ethiopia) was announced to the whole world. The Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I, who recently lived in Khartoum, returned to his country on an English plane, settling in one of the British bases. English troops and stern Ethiopian warriors marched in saluting the imperial standard. Again, thousands of surrendered Italian soldiers and the jubilant voices of BBC announcers: "The second collapse of the Roman Empire!"

Hitler ordered the preparations for Operation Sonnenblum (Sunflower) to be hastily accelerated to transfer two German divisions to North Africa in order to prevent the final catastrophe. "As soon as the Americans enter the war," the clever General Jodl once said at a meeting, "they and the British will immediately land in Italy and knock her out of the war. We are too weak at sea to prevent this."

In Germany, the "Days of Friedrich" are noisily celebrated. The showcases display portraits of the great king. Mostly in one pose: full-length, leaning on a massive cane, the great king is watching the battle.

A single motive runs like a red thread: one against all of Europe. For many people, this evokes grim analogies. The great Frederick nearly destroyed Germany. The French captured the Rhine provinces, the Danes - Schleswig-Holstein, the Russians - Koenigsberg and Berlin.

The main thing: Frederick did not seek peace, but fought to the end. On this occasion, Hitler received the military. Commanders of the branches of the armed forces: Brauchitsch, Goering and Raeder with their chiefs of staff, field marshals and retired field marshals, colonel generals and full generals.

Hitler's relationship with the army remained difficult, although the Fuhrer began to fight for the army long before he came to power.

Many remembered how in September 1930 the Supreme Court of Weimar Germany tried three lieutenants from the Ulm garrison on charges of spreading Nazi propaganda among military personnel. The government fought with all possible forces against fascism in the army. However, the youth of the army became more and more infected with the ideas of Nazism.

The Minister of War, General Wilhelm Groener, in order to avoid unnecessary publicity, wanted to try the young lieutenants in a closed military court, but one of the accused, Lieutenant Wilhelm Scheringer, managed to report this to the Nazi newspaper Volkischer Beobachter, which made a terrible noise about the infringement of democracy and publicity and the return of the dark era of the last war - the era of "closed military tribunals". The result was an open trial.

The defense called Hitler himself as a witness. I must say that before coming to power, Hitler repeatedly sued someone, acting either as a plaintiff, or as a defendant, or as a witness. Not only did he not avoid the courts, but he himself rushed to them in order to once again publicly declare his views and intentions.

Hitler rushed to this trial with particular enthusiasm. He felt that instinctive

the distrust that the army has in him and was ready to do anything to dispel this distrust. The fate of the three young officers, of course, worried him immeasurably less than the possibility of enlisting the support of the entire officer corps.

"These three young people," he said at the trial, "are gravely mistaken if they think that we are even speculatively discussing the possibility of an armed rebellion. To come to power, we are going to use only constitutional means. I will never allow myself a single step that would put me in such a position that I would be forced to fight the German army. Against. When the government of our country passes into my hands, and this is a matter of a few months, I will consider the current gentlemen of the officers as the core from which the great army of the German people will grow.

Hitler spoke, holding his left hand on his heart, and stretched his right, clenched into a fist, forward. The rumble went through the hall, interrupted by uncertain applause. With this speech, Hitler won the Reichswehr, clearly making it clear that he did not intend to split the army, sucking his supporters out of it. He wants it all, but not before he becomes head of state.

The verdict of the court - 1.5 years in prison for each of the accused - did not satisfy anyone then. For those who sympathized with Hitler, the sentence looked too harsh. For others, it's too soft. If the judges had acted with all the strictness of the law, they might have been able to restore some confidence in the future to the army and bring the officers out of the hypnotic shock caused by the speech of Hitler, who spoke for an hour and no one dared to interrupt him. The timidity of the Leipzig judges finally demoralized the army, throwing it into the arms of Hitler.

She (the army) did not rejoice, but did not protest when, 34 months after the trial in Leipzig, on July 14, 1933, Hitler's decree appeared, which said:

"The German National Socialist Workers' Party is the only legal political party in Germany."

The army did not show itself in any way when the elections were canceled, the post of president was abolished with the death of Field Marshal Hindenburg, the constitution was canceled and Hitler, being chancellor, officially declared himself "the Fuhrer of the German nation."

The army stirred up a little after the publication of the anti-Jewish Nuremberg laws. The army, air force and navy refused to extradite the Jews from their midst. Oddly enough, Hitler did not insist. Such well-known Jewish officers as Bakenkeler, Grassmann, Rogge, Milch and many other lesser known ones remained in the cadre of the armed forces until the very collapse of the Reich. Goering's words: "In my headquarters I myself decide who is a Jew and who is not" became a kind of guide to action.

Representatives of the highest echelon of the German officer corps were perplexed and considered Hitler's anti-Semitic policy a major tactical mistake. They quoted the famous words of the Kaiser, who once declared: "There are no Jews in Germany, but there are Germans of the Jewish faith. Without their help, Germany would never have been great." Wouldn't it be better to have money, enterprise, brains and international connections of Jews on your side?

However, knowing the opinion of the senior officers on this matter, Hitler from time to time tried to explain to the generals the roots and origins of his attitude towards the Jews.

"Our era marks the beginning of the most ruthless struggle for world domination. This struggle is actually between two nations - between the Germans and the Jews. Everything else is just an optical illusion. The Israelis stand behind England, the USA and the USSR. Even if we expel the Jews from Germany, they will still remain our enemies on a world scale ...

What a dangerous, omnipresent and secretive enemy! And I realized that for the fate of the whole world it is necessary to wage a decisive battle with them!

By placing me at the head of Germany, the higher powers pointed precisely to the German people as the new Chosen People! And two nations cannot be elected at the same time. We are now the people of God! The time of the Jews is over. Two supernations cannot exist at the same time! One of them must be destroyed."

From a purely military point of view, it was not clear why, in the process of one's own revival, one should immediately challenge the "supernation", which, according to the Fuhrer himself, rules over the world. If Hitler was so obsessed with the idea of fighting the Jews, then this struggle could be started later, when the forces were at least a little equalized. If the Jews really are a powerful "world force", then the results are already evident: only a year and a half of the war has passed, and Germany is already surrounded by enemies, and most importantly, without friends. And she is no longer busy with the search for victory, but with the search for salvation. The Fuhrer's plans will lead to the fact that in addition to England, in the very near future, he will have to fight the USSR and the USA, that is, with the whole world.

Hitler's attempts to instill in the military the simplistic truth that no matter what fronts they fight on, everywhere they fight with the Jews, did not reach the military. Many perceived the war with England as a tragedy, where their friends and relatives were full. So it was in the last war, so it happened in the present. Hitler could no longer vouch for how the army would behave if it were some kind of miracle in the British Isles. There would have been no fraternization, as in the First World War, which ultimately led to the collapse of the Kaiser's Germany.

But it was pure theory. Hitler knew perfectly well that he would never reach England, and even more so the United States.

The short time that he still has must be used to knock Stalin out of the future game.

But deploying their armies to the East, it was necessary to reckon with the fact that almost the entire military elite of the Wehrmacht, including division commanders, was infected with the so-called "spirit of Rapallo." In decoding, this meant that most of the leading German officer corps, primarily tankers, pilots and submariners, were trained and educated in the Soviet Union. This story was old and began on Easter Sunday, April 17, 1922, when an agreement was signed in the quiet Italian resort town of Rapallo, restoring diplomatic relations between Germany and the Soviet Republic.

Germany lay humiliated and defeated after losing the First World War. Russia, devastated by world and civil wars, squeezed in the iron grip of the totalitarian communist regime, was isolated from the whole world, which put up something like a "cordon sanitaire" against it. The Treaty of Rapallo was her first breakthrough into the international arena. The rest of Europe and America made fun of this alliance, calling it the union of the "blind and the lame", the "pact of the beggars", etc. But, as further developments showed, they made fun of the union of two outcasts in vain. In addition to mutually beneficial trade, providing jobs in Germany and the influx of new technology into the USSR, both sides quickly established military

connections.

The initial objectives of military cooperation between Germany and Russia were formulated by the former head of the Kaiser's secret service, Colonel Walter Nicolai, the old and good handler of the Bolsheviks since the days before the February Revolution. It is not known whether the old colonel met with Lenin, but with members

Lenin's Central Committee met repeatedly, instructing them in detail and thoughtfully. One of Colonel Nicolai's old collaborators was Karl Radek, a close friend of Lenin and Trotsky, who was then in charge of Soviet foreign policy propaganda. In particular, on his instructions, the Comintern, for its part, also joined the struggle against the Treaty of Versailles, calling it a capitalist offensive against the German proletariat. Regarding military cooperation, Radek wrote: "The new Soviet army is ready to provide unlimited opportunities for experienced German officers. We need help to restore the completely destroyed Russian military machine. In exchange, the Soviet Union will be able to produce weapons that the Reichswehr is forbidden to have, and the Reichswehr will be able to learn how to use these weapons by undergoing combat training on Russian soil.

After carefully probing the German reaction, the Soviet Ambassador Krestinsky made direct proposals on this score to the German War Minister Otto Gessler and the commander of the Reichswehr, General Hans von Seeckt. As a result, a whole package of secret agreements was signed, according to which annually, until 1930, a third of the annual budget of the Reichswehr plus 120 million so-called "stabilized" marks were invested in a strange cartel, which had a rather intricate name: "Industrial Development Corporation". Junkers aircraft were designed and built in Fili and Samara, artillery shells in Tula and Zlatoust, the production of chemical warfare agents was established in Krasnogvardeysk, and Leningrad provided its research and production base for the creation of new submarines.

At the same time, for the combat training of specialists of the German army, three large training bases were deployed in Lipetsk, Voronezh and Kazan. Future officers of the Luftwaffe were trained in Lipetsk and Voronezh, and tankers were trained in Kazan, who in the future were to hit the whole world, and most of all Russia, with mortal blows from tank wedges. 20 thousand future officers of the Wehrmacht underwent combat training at air bases and tank sites of the Soviet Union.

It was a fantastic undertaking. Prototypes of aircraft and tanks, developed in Germany and made there secretly in one copy by sea, were delivered in parts to Leningrad through the free port of Stettin. There they were assembled and tested at the test sites, and then entered mass production at Soviet factories. The first prototypes of the Yu-87 dive bomber and the future Messerschmitt were tested at Soviet training grounds. Until the end of their lives, German pilots and tankers considered Lipetsk and Kazan to be their Alma Mater. Without their preparation, it would have been impossible to create in the shortest possible time neither the powerful formations of the Luftwaffe, nor the legendary tank groups of Guderian, Hoth and Manstein.

At Soviet training grounds, officers of the Red Army trained side by side with German officers in no less numbers, inevitably creating a spirit of common military brotherhood, which, according to the plan of the organizers of this large-scale event, should eventually develop into the spirit of the strongest military alliance in history.

The future military alliance matured not only in joint tough exercises, where both Germans and Russians died equally often, but in the quiet of the offices of the top military leadership of the two countries.

The commander of the Reichswehr, General Seeckt, hatched a plan to attack Poland as the first step towards the elimination of the Treaty of Versailles, since he considered Poland to be a French outpost in the east. His plans found a lively response from Mikhail Tukhachevsky and other leaders of the Red Army, who also had Poland as a thorn in their side. They directly demanded the conclusion of a military alliance with Germany, frightening Stalin with the possibility that Germany could be lured to itself by Western countries and launch a campaign against the USSR with a united military alliance. Brotherhood in arms below and united military plans above gave rise to precisely what was called the "spirit of Rapallo" and, of course, even the

the idea of a possible military clash between the USSR and Germany could not have occurred to anyone even in a nightmare.

Hitler's coming to power crossed out all far-reaching plans, but the "spirit of Rapallo" - the spirit of military fraternity in arms - took root in both the Soviet and German armies.

Stalin solved this problem with his characteristic ingenious simplicity, having shot everyone related to those events: from Radek, Krestinsky and Tukhachevsky, to the commandants of the airfield in Lipetsk and the tankodrome in Kazan.

However, Hitler could not disregard the moods of the officer corps. On the one hand, the "fraternal people" are the British, on the other, brothers in arms. How will the army behave in the coming deadly battle with the "brothers"?

The newest English battleship "King George V", spectacularly raising the barrels of its four-gun turrets of the main caliber, majestically entered the American Chesapeake Bay, in the depths of which was the capital of the United States, Washington.

The battleship was accompanied by a whole squadron of boats, pleasure yachts, and private steamships.

The battleship delivered to the United States the new British ambassador, Lord Halifax, who had recently held the post of Foreign Minister in Churchill's cabinet. The very fact that yesterday's minister was sent as ambassador to the United States spoke volumes, and the way he was delivered on the newest battleship, specially withdrawn from the combat zone for this purpose, spoke even more.

But even this was not enough for the organizers of the show, which testifies to the de facto formation of the Anglo-American military alliance. The American heavy cruiser Agosta was slowly moving towards the English battleship, on the mast of which was the blue standard of the President of the United States. Such a meeting of an ambassador on a battleship with a head of state on a heavy cruiser was not provided for by any protocols or even traditions.

The journalists who rushed to the White House, trying to find out what the president had in mind when they met the foreign ambassador on a heavy cruiser, as always, did not really learn anything.

The newspapers punned, although everyone with eyes saw the situation quite clearly. Both sides openly demonstrated the potential power of their military alliance.

In addition to the British ambassador, the battleship King George V delivered to Washington an extensive report by Harry Hopkins on his stay in England. "Dear Mr. President! Hopkins reported. "I am sending my message with Colonel Lee, who is returning with Halifax ... The people here, from Churchill onwards, are wonderful, and if courage alone can win, there can be no doubt about the results. However, they desperately need our help. Churchill personifies the government in every sense of the word, he determines the big strategy, and often solves private issues; the workers trust him; army, navy and air force to the last man support him; politicians and upper classes pretend to like him... Churchill wants to meet you, and as soon as possible...

I have been granted full access to all classified material.... The most important single remark I must make is that most members of the cabinet and all the military leaders of England

believe that an invasion is imminent and imminent. They make every effort day and night to



prepare to face it. They believe that an invasion can happen at any moment, but not before May 1 ... The spirit of the people and their determination to resist the invasion is beyond all

praise.

No matter how ferocious the attack is, you can be sure that they will fight back and fight back effectively. I am sure that if we act boldly and quickly on several main fronts, we will be able to transfer enough materials to England in a few weeks to give her the extra strength needed to push back Hitler ... "

The third term in office developed in Roosevelt the strongest dictatorial inclinations, which had no analogue in a country like the United States. Outwardly, all democratic procedures were observed, but in fact the country's policy was determined by a narrow circle of people directed by the president. Cabinet members knew nothing about the plans and intentions of the president, especially in everything related to foreign policy issues. Once Roosevelt very sharply rebuked the Secretary of the Interior Ickes, telling him: "We are talking about ... foreign policy, which is dealt with by the president and under his leadership the secretary of state. Considerations in this area are now extremely delicate and highly secret. They are unknown and cannot be fully known to you or anyone else, with the exception of the two indicated persons. The delicate and secret considerations were to get some of the emotionally irresponsible countries to lose patience and declare war on America. Then the isolationists in Congress would have nowhere to go. He hoped that his speech about the "garden hose" and the submission of the Lend-Lease law to Congress would blow up the mentally unbalanced Hitler and that in one fell swoop, declaring war on the States, would solve all his problems. After all, no other country not officially participating in the war, even in thought, dared to behave so defiantly with the Reich of Adolf Hitler.

But Hitler held back. From the tone of the German press, it was clear that a time bomb was already working in the mind of the Fuhrer, who never forgot or forgave such an attitude towards his person and towards his politics, which he had to endure from Washington for a whole year. But no one could say when this mine would go off.

There were still Japanese who, in their Asian spontaneity and samurai pride, could also lose all remnants of common sense and, blinded by thoughtful humiliation, to rush at the offender, not thinking about any consequences, like a dog whose tail has been stepped on.

Together with Cordwell Hull, Roosevelt had already prepared a decree on an embargo on trade with Japan if she did not stop expansion in Southeast Asia. Then all Japanese assets in American banks will be frozen. Two or three ultimatums with insulting turns. All this will be enough for the offended samurai to draw his sword and be killed by a point-blank shot.

Preparing the country for war, Roosevelt had already decided to create a joint intelligence service of the United States and Britain, calling this institution the Office of Strategic Services. The British gladly agreed to set up a similar institution headed by an American. Officially, the United States did not have any intelligence agency. The FBI was mainly involved in counterintelligence and crime fighting. Military Intelligence - In their specialized affairs, State Department Intelligence operated within a very tight diplomatic framework. The global tasks that President Roosevelt thought to put before his country required global intelligence support.

At the head of the new intelligence agency, Roosevelt decided to put a fairly well-known lawyer, William Donovan. A participant in the last war, a colonel in the army reserve, Donovan had the talent to get any information and the ability to ingratiate himself with the devil himself.

Returning from Europe, Donovan was filled with creative optimism. Hitler is already rushing about like an old rat caught in a primitive mousetrap. He thinks he will find a way out in Greece, which Churchill sets up for him as a piece of cheese. Now he definitely aimed to rush there, and making sure that there was no way out there either, he would grab Stalin's throat, if only because it was he who dragged him into this game. Unless, of course, Stalin is so stupid that he waits for this and does not slam his Berlin friend first.

This would be very unfortunate, the president noted, because if Stalin got into Europe, he would cause us much more headaches than Hitler, whose every move is now easily predictable. In principle, Donovan agreed, they were almost the same gangsters, but from different gangs. Now they are going to racketeer one institution called Europe, and this, as you well know, Mr. President, always ends in a shootout. Moreover, the one who managed to shoot first does not always win.

Roosevelt showed Donovan a copy of the Barbarossa plan obtained by Woods.

Do the Russians know? the scout asked.

"I think so," the President replied. - If this document has reached us, then it certainly has reached them. However, Hull believes that for the time being, Moscow should not be informed of this. On the one hand, this can provoke Stalin, and on the other, it can frighten Adolf.

"Don't worry, Frank," Donovan reassured the President, "Stalin will never attack first. Now he is apparently the last person in the world who still believes in the Sea Lion operation, and Hitler spends a huge amount of time and resources so that Stalin does not lose faith in this. Stalin is waiting for his landing in England in order to start his victory march, and Hitler assures everyone that somewhere in late June or early July he will certainly land in England. And since this is absolutely impossible, it means that it was at this time that he would attack his best friend. I'm willing to bet \$10.

"I don't want to risk my money so recklessly, Bill," laughed Roosevelt. - If everything that you predict comes true, this is wonderful, but I'm afraid that life can make such adjustments to the theory that it can come as a complete surprise to all of us. And the last thing I want to tell you for now, Bill, in any case, you must always proceed from the main thing: Hitler is already our enemy now, and Stalin is our future ally, whom Heaven itself created to fulfill the American dream, as Jefferson used to say.

"I must admit," Donovan sighed, "no matter how hard I try, I don't see much difference between these two guys. Unless Hitler is much more frank and more straightforward.

"So you're a fool," Roosevelt concluded, "and in such games it's dangerous to bet on fools." Besides, Bill, you don't see the difference between them just because you look from a distance. When you manage to get closer, you will see that the difference is huge.

On January 28, General Halder convened a meeting on practical preparations for Operation Barbarossa. The picture turned out to be completely bleak. No transport

enough catastrophically. The army was provided with gasoline for three months of hostilities. Approximately the same time is calculated for the consumption of all types of ammunition. Diesel fuel - for one month of hostilities. In other words, given the cost of strategic deployment, the entire stockpile would only last two full months of hostilities. Most vehicles will have to be mobilized from the civilian sector. Automobile, aviation and artillery tires are understaffed by more than 70% [74]. Most of the trucks will have to be put on iron rims, like the baggage carts during the Thirty Years' War. General Thomas recalled that natural rubber stocks would run out in February and that it could only be imported through Russia. Among other things, what are the soles for soldiers' boots and gas masks made of?

General Halder recorded the general decision of the meeting in his famous diary: "Operation Barbarossa. The meaning of the campaign is not clear. We do not affect England in the slightest. Our economic base will not improve significantly from this. The riskiness of our position in the West cannot be underestimated. It is even possible that Italy, after losing her colonies, will collapse and a southern front will be formed against us on the territory of Spain, Italy and Greece. If at the same time we are shackled in Russia, the situation will become even more difficult.

The chief of the general staff shared his thoughts with Brauchitsch.

"We have no way out, Franz," the commander-in-chief of the ground forces sighed. "If Stalin manages to strike first, we are completely finished.

"Not with our resources," Halder protested. "If we don't get it done in five months at the most, we'll just postpone the same end for those same five months.

"The Führer believes that if a strong blow is struck, then everything will fall apart there," Brauchitsch replied, "and Canaris believes that this is a very likely development of events.

This whole operation will take from two weeks to a month. Calculations show the real possibility of the complete defeat of all Russian groups numbering about 8 million person.

"I understand all this," Halder agreed, "but all the same, all this strongly reeks of adventure. If some kind of failure occurs, and the campaign drags on for, say, at least five months instead of a couple of months, then winter will come. The army does not have winter uniforms. The petrol engines of our tanks, planes and trucks will begin to fail. Diseases, frostbite and the like will begin in the troops. I drew the Führer's attention to this circumstance, but he does not want to listen to anything. The army won't need winter gear, he says, because "I don't intend to fight in Russia before winter." Everything will end at the end of the summer. Well, I objected, but even if everything ends before the onset of winter, the troops will have to carry out occupation and garrison service, stand deployed on some kind of demarcation line, and so on. One way or another, they will need winter uniforms. Then he shouted: "Halder! When this problem arises, I will solve it! Now winter uniforms will only lower the morale of the troops. The soldiers will decide that they will have to fight there until next summer!"

"He's right about something," said Brauchitsch. - If we start preparing winter uniforms now, then we will certainly alarm the Russians, since this cannot be done unnoticed.

Then the generals went to dinner. The dinner passed, in the words of General Halder, "in a depressed mood."

Another exceptionally joyful event awaited the Soviet people.

On January 30, newspapers and radio published the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council that the huge punitive monster of the NKVD swelled so much that it was divided into two independent People's Commissariats - Internal Affairs and State Security, and Comrade Beria L.P. received the title of "General Commissar of State Security", which corresponded to the rank of marshal of the Soviet Union. At the same time, somehow imperceptibly, a message came about the appointment of Comrade Merkulov V.N. People's Commissar of State Security. And absolutely nothing was reported that it was on January 30 that General of the Army Zhukov began to fulfill his new duties as Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army.

On the eve of the commemoration of Vladimir Ilyich, People's Commissar Timoshenko issued a secret order "On the enrollment in the cadres of the Red Army of the commanding staff of the reserve, called up for mobilization" (No. 023), which said:

"The commanding staff of the reserve, drafted into the ranks of the Red Army for mobilization on the basis of the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR dated

September 23, 1939 and detained until further notice in accordance with the order of the NPO of the USSR No. 0110 dated June 3, 1940 ... enlist in the cadres ... People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Timoshenko.

By this remarkable order, all reserve officers, called up back in 1939 for a campaign in Poland and the war with Finland, were to remain in the army forever. The vast majority - until the end of life.

After reviewing the general studies of his predecessors: Yegorov, Shaposhnikov and Meretskov on Operation Thunderstorm, Zhukov correctly decided that if February is already in the yard, and the operation is scheduled for July-August, then it is necessary to deploy troops, transform districts into fronts, form front-line headquarters. That is, take things seriously. To draft another 800 thousand people into the army. To oblige industry to further increase the output of all types of military equipment, taking into account its inevitable "expenditure" at the first stage of the war.

It is clear that only Stalin could solve such questions, who, having learned about the arrival of Zhukov from Kyiv, ordered him to quickly get in the know and report back.

Zhukov was "in the know" during the week "for 16 hours a day", consulting with the highly experienced Shaposhnikov and his old developers: Vasilevsky and Vatutin.

On February 8, Timoshenko and Zhukov went to see Stalin at a nearby dacha. The leader was in a good mood. He had just watched a film report on the tests of a rocket-propelled mortar, later called the Katyusha. The action of the Katyushas made a strong impression on the leader, therefore, before Timoshenko and Zhukov had time to enter, the leader asked if they were familiar with the new rocket launchers.

"I only heard about them, but I didn't see them," Zhukov admitted.

"Then," Stalin ordered, "together with Timoshenko and Kulik, you should go to the firing range in the near future and watch their shooting.

With a gesture of a hospitable host, Stalin invited the military to the table and, according to his habit, he himself poured everyone a large plate of thick Ukrainian borscht from the tureen. On the second was

buckwheat porridge with boiled meat. On the third - compote and fruit. Stalin, who did not leave a good mood, indulged the military with jokes, treated them to Georgian wine "Khvanchkara" and drank with pleasure himself.

But Zhukov's proposal was met with caution. Deploy fronts and front headquarters? The front is the largest grouping of the armed forces created

only in wartime. The front must have a control service, a headquarters. Under his command are several armies, air divisions, a front-line air defense system, special communications units, reinforcements, engineering troops and, of course, front-line rears. In total, about a million soldiers and officers. In peacetime, there are no fronts. There are counties. The creation and deployment of the front indicates that peacetime has ended and wartime has begun. And the enemy will definitely find out about this, since it is almost impossible to hide such a large-scale event.

So Stalin said no. It's too early. We will provoke the Germans to the first blow.

Everyone was forcedly silent and began to look hopefully at the present Marshal Shaposhnikov, who until then had only listened, but did not say anything. Timoshenko and Zhukov looked to Shaposhnikov as the most courageous in their conversations with Stalin. Such was his well-deserved fame.

Choosing the most tactful formulations of old-fashioned expressions, using professorial intonations in his voice, explaining to the patient in simple terms the symptoms of his complex illness, Marshal Shaposhnikov delivered a short speech, which boiled down to the following.

How does Comrade Stalin imagine Operation Thunderstorm in general? The government makes a decision to start it, the people's commissar of defense gives a direct command to the border districts and the troops go. No, Comrade Stalin, that's not how things are done. It is necessary to deploy fronts and front headquarters. This is a long and tedious business. If we start right now, then God forbid to manage by the end of May.

Stalin listened attentively. He always listened to Shaposhnikov very attentively. The only deep military professional who survived the terrible massacre arranged by Yezhov.

- Boris Mikhailovich, - the leader objected, - but this will provoke the Germans to a preemptive strike ...

- The whole point is this and lies in the fact that the first blow can only be delivered by the one who first deploys armies, creates battle fronts and controls them. The presence of any number of troops, in principle, does not matter much if the indicated measures are not carried out. For example, there are currently between 70 and 99 enemy divisions on our western border. And we are calm. Why? Not only because these forces are too few. And small forces can deliver such a sudden blow, the consequences of which can be catastrophic. But because front-line headquarters or headquarters of army groups are not deployed on our border, as is customary with the Germans. That is, all these divisions, about which Comrade Golikov and his subordinates are so worried, simply cannot move forward. We see a different picture in the West. In preparation for the invasion of England, the Germans deployed three front-line headquarters: two in France and one on the west coast of Norway. This is evidenced by all the intelligence and analysis of radio intercepts.

There was silence.

"Go on, Boris Mikhailovich," said Stalin, looking around at everyone with a wary look.

Are the generals who have entered into an agreement drawing him into some kind of adventure.

"Besides," continued Shaposhnikov, "Hitler is clearly not up to us now. He needs to save his ally, Italy, from collapse. And do it quickly. Because he didn't have time to think. On February 8, the United States Congress in the first reading passed a law on the so-called "Lend-Lease". This is tantamount to a declaration of war. According to our information, the United States will be ready to enter the war no later than the beginning of 1942. By this time, they will have completed the first phase of their impressive weapons program. However, all America's efforts will be in vain if Hitler captures the British Isles by this time, because all Roosevelt's plans are based on the transfer of American troops and military equipment to England in order to strike at Europe from there. This, of course, is a theory. Personally, I believe that such a landing operation is absolutely impossible in practice. But it's not that. Let's get back to the facts. To save himself from imminent catastrophe, Hitler must land in England during the short period of favorable weather, which, according to many years of observation, sets in the English Channel from about the beginning of July to the end of August.

By that time, of course, we must be fully prepared if we want to realize the tasks set by the Party and by you personally, Comrade Stalin.

- And what is your opinion, comrade Zhukov? the leader asked.

"I fully agree with the opinion of Comrade Marshal," replied the Chief of the General Staff. - But I, in turn, wanted to report to you, Comrade Stalin, that the calculations of the General Staff dictate the need to call up at least a million more people.

Yes, Stalin perfectly understood the need for all the measures proposed by the top leaders of the Red Army, whom he himself carefully selected and appointed to

the posts they hold.

But after all, such large-scale events cannot be hidden, and they can force Hitler not only to postpone (or even cancel) the upcoming landing in England, but, in turn, to take measures against such a blatant threat from the East.

The leader was silent. All those present were also silent, not daring to interrupt the leader's train of thought.

"But if we provoke him with our measures," Stalin broke the silence, slowly uttering the words. "And he will attack us without letting us complete all the necessary preparations?"

- What is he, a psycho, or what? - escaped from General Zhukov. - How will he attack us, Comrade Stalin? We reported to you that he is not up to us now. He has now begun the transfer of large aviation forces to the south, to help the Italians. German troops are loaded into Genoa.

What if he's crazy? Stalin interrupted.

Of course, none of those present could answer this question, if only because no one really knew who the leader of all peoples considered Hitler to be. You will fit in with your opinion, then you will not end up in trouble.

But Stalin himself could answer this question.

From the mid-thirties, Stalin had at his disposal the well-known Berlin psychiatrist Dr. Arthur Kronfeld, who lived in Moscow. The uniqueness of Dr. Kronfeld

was that he managed to conduct a psychiatric examination of Hitler. In May 1932, Hitler sued "for slander" against a certain Werner Abel, who accused the future Fuhrer of receiving 10 million lire from the Italian fascists. The scandal erupted over the fact that the National Socialist Party, represented in the German parliament, was financed from abroad, which was prohibited by law.

Since from the very beginning of the process the plaintiff and the defendant accused each other of abnormality, the court, at the mutual request of the lawyers, invited a psychiatrist for an official examination of both. The conclusion of Dr. Kronfeld was unequivocal: Hitler is a pronounced psychopath with the most acute sexual inferiority complexes. "Hitler of medium height," Dr. Kronfeld wrote in conclusion, "narrow shoulders, wide backside, thick legs, heavy gait emphasizes the ugly body structure. An insignificant mouth, small cloudy eyes, a short skull, an overly large chin emphasize the well-known degenerative primitiveness ... He incredibly grimace, constantly in some kind of restless movement. Like many pronounced psychopathic personalities, Hitler is sexually abnormal ... Hitler has convulsive epileptic seizures. Psychopaths of this type, Dr. Kronfeld pointed out, are prone to depression from time to time, from which they usually come out in a state of completely uncontrolled aggressiveness. Uncontrolled aggressiveness allows you to forget about the risk and rush at a much stronger opponent, who is often not able to provide adequate resistance, while under the influence of a powerful impulse of madness energy.

The energy of madness was precisely the topic that Dr. Arthur Kronfeld researched fundamentally. The same

the energy of madness helped Lenin to lead the deceived masses of the Russian mob, hypnotizing them with the uncomplicated slogan "Rob the loot." Uncomplicated, but ingenious, if you look deeper into it, because the microscopic line separates the brilliant from the insane.

After Hitler came to power, Dr. Kronfeld immediately left Germany, since he was also half Jewish. In 1935, the professor, with his wife and his favorite assistant, Erich Sternberg, arrived in the USSR. Unlike other political emigrants, he settled down very well, having received a luxurious apartment, where he brought his richest library, a collection of French erotic bronzes and luxurious furniture from Switzerland. Having received the opportunity to practice richly in Moscow, Dr. Kronfeld personally advised Stalin, together with Professor Snezhnevsky conducted psychiatric examinations for the NKVD, dealt with the fundamental problems of psychiatry, becoming the author of a number of works and the father of Soviet sexopathology.

In 1939, on the instructions of the NKVD, Kronfeld published a secret pamphlet published by the printing house of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks in a circulation of 50 copies and entitled "Degenerates in Power", where he gave a thorough psychiatric analysis to all the leaders of the Third Reich. In 1940-41, Dr. Kronfeld was repeatedly called to the Kremlin and Lubyanka, advising the highest officials. He also fulfilled the secret order of the People's Commissariat of Defense by developing a methodology for selecting people entering aviation schools and a set of psychological tests for them [75].

Therefore, to answer the question posed by Stalin, whether Hitler was crazy or not, could, as usual, be answered only by himself. It was Stalin's favorite technique: to pose the question yourself and answer it yourself. But Stalin did not answer this question until the end of his days. If one famous psychiatrist recognized Hitler as a "psychopath", and another recognized Stalin as a "paranoid", then in essence, despite the different terminology, it was about the deviations they noticed in the work of the brain, and consequently, the nervous system, from those

criteria that are considered normal. Since we know nothing about our own brain, except for the very fact of its existence, we cannot know the nature of that powerful, hypnotic energy that the brain afflicted with this or that disease spreads around itself. But for some reason, only outright madmen and epileptics succeeded in mastering the masses, exterminating some and knocking others into ranks, blinding them and then leading them along different roads into one abyss. This is one of the most interesting mysteries

humanity.

On February 9, 1941, as in the good old Nelsonian times, a squadron of English ships, demonstrating their frank contempt for the Italian fleet, appeared at the powerful Italian naval base and the largest commercial port of Genoa. The English ships left Gibraltar under the command of Admiral Sir James Somerville, who held the flag on the battlecruiser Rinaun. Behind him, dancing in the stern and pitching, like a heavyweight boxer in the ring, baring his terrible trunks of his eight fifteen-inch guns, walked the battleship Malaya, still scorched by the fire of Jutland. The cruiser Sheffield led the covering ships, and the aircraft carrier Ark Royal kept a little more seaward, whose aircraft were preparing to support the actions of the battleships.

Turning to a combat course, Rinaun and Malaya began bombarding Genoa, sending 16 fifteen-inch shells to the city and port every 40 seconds.

The effect was horrendous. Huge shells demolished high-rise buildings in the city and port. Transports were sinking, with German tanks and soldiers loaded on them, intended for transfer to Africa to help the dying Italian army. Machine-building plants of the Ansaldo company were burning, ammunition depots were burning and collapsing, oil tanks were exploding.

Having fired 400 shells, the English squadron retired with dignity, losing 1 aircraft.

On the same day, British bombers hit Messina and Naples.

Starting from February 2, British aviation day and night bombed the ports of Northern France: Cherbourg, Le Havre, Calais, and the Belgian port of Ostend, destroying docks, cranes, moorings and warehouses, mercilessly drowning all enemy transports that dared to go there.

On February 10, the British dropped an airborne assault, which, taking advantage of surprise, captured the port of Calabria at the southern tip of Italy, destroying everything that was possible in the port and seizing a lot of secret documents and equipment. The approaching destroyers took the paratroopers on board and left, firing several farewell salvos at the port.

Panic reigned in both Germany and Italy, since the increased activity of the British air force and navy clearly showed that the British were up to something new in order to finally demoralize the degraded heirs of great Rome.

As early as February 7, stunning news came: Marshal Graziani, leaving his soldiers, fled to Tripoli, and the remnants of the once mighty Italian army left by him, which had the task of restoring the Roman Empire and its former glory, ceased to exist as an organized combat unit. To complete the campaign, it was necessary to capture Tripoli. In other words, just drive to this port in tanks and trucks. However, from Cairo, from the commander-in-chief of the British forces in the Middle East, General Wywell, an order was received to stop the offensive on the El Agheila-Marada line, regroup forces and wait for further orders. In vain O'Connor on the radio tried to convince



the commander-in-chief that his troops did not need rest and could develop an offensive on Tripoli, setting an even faster pace in order to prevent German troops from landing on this last Italian base.

On February 12, General Dorman-Smith flew to Cairo, hoping to convince Wywell to immediately resume his offensive against Tripoli, the Libyan capital, the last major naval base still in Italian hands.

As soon as he entered the commander-in-chief's office, Dorman-Smith saw that operational maps of the Libyan desert had disappeared from the walls, replaced by maps of Greece. Wywell informed Dorman-Smith that the new Greek prime minister, Alexander Corysis, had openly called for British help as soon as he took office. An order followed from London: to immediately suspend the offensive in the western desert, redirecting the main forces of their troops to help Greece.

Historians still regard this decision by Churchill as his biggest strategic mistake during the entire war. They note with irony that the main "fault" of Wywell and O'Connor is that they dealt with the Italians too quickly, making the catastrophe of Mussolini's armed forces too obvious. If they held out with this for another four months, systematically pushing the Italians to Tripoli, Hitler, stuck in the Soviet Union, could not start his African campaign, and the Allies would not have to fight for almost 2 more years to finally establish themselves on the entire African coast from the Atlantic to Suez.

In this bold hypothesis, only one question hangs in the air: would there have been an attack on the Soviet Union at all if Italy had collapsed not in 1943, but in 1941?

Is it possible that Churchill's biggest strategic mistake was deliberate? Churchill was not a man capable of making ill-considered steps, let alone reckless ones.

Alas, history does not tolerate subjunctive moods.

On February 8, General Erwin Rommel was summoned to the Fuhrer. This did not cause him any excitement, because Rommel, while still a colonel, had to command a battalion of Hitler's personal guard, accompanying the Fuhrer on various risky trips. For example, to torn apart Poland before the capture of Warsaw in September 1939.

Previously, Rommel fought in the First World War, rose to the rank of major in the Kaiser's army and was awarded the highest order of those times - the neck cross "Poule le Merit" ("For Valor").

After Hitler came to power, Colonel Rommel attracted the favorable attention of the Fuhrer and was appointed head of the military training of the Hitler Youth (Hitler Youth Union). In this position, he immediately quarreled with the head of the Hitler Youth, Baldur von Schirach, who created around himself the Hitler Youth elite from sixteen accelerators under the slogan that "youth should be led by youth." Seeing how these "snotty Fuhrers" command their subordinate "standards" (regiments), sitting in huge sparkling "Mercedes", as if they were already field marshals, Rommel became furious and almost drove the "Fuhrers" out of the "Mercedes" with a stick into service. Those complained to Schirach, and he to Hitler.

As a result of this squabble, Rommel was transferred to command a guard battalion, and after the defeat of Poland, Hitler, noting that to keep such an experienced and energetic officer on

battalion, even if this battalion of his personal guards, unreasonably suggested that Rommel go somewhere with a promotion.

"What would you like to command?" Hitler asked. "Panzer division," Rommel answered without a second of delay and received command of the 7th Panzer Division, which, after some time, swept like a whirlwind along the roads of France, making 150 kilometers per day. Advancing along the canal coast, the 7th Panzer moved from the Belgian border to Cherbourg in five weeks, earning the name "ghost division" for its rapid advance and the unexpected appearance in places where the enemy did not expect it.

Hitler received Rommel in the presence of Brauchitsch. The Führer informed the general that he had been appointed commander of a special group consisting of the 5th Light Division and part of the 15th Panzer Division, which were already loading in Genoa for transfer through Tripoli to North Africa to save Italy from total collapse. By the end of May, Rommel was promised to transfer the entire 15th Panzer Division to Africa. "Rommel! exclaimed Hitler pathetically. Save Mussolini. We have no other allies in the world but him. Only enemies! "More enemies - more honor, my Führer!" - Rommel quoted Kaiser Wilhelm II; which the enemies pressed from all sides.

"Exactly," he said, shaking hands with Rommel, "the more enemies, the more honor! Your Kaiser also liked to say that Germany is a sword in the hand of God. Now Germany is a sword in my hands. You are my sword, Rommel!"

When Rommel flew to Rome on February 11, he already knew that as a result of the bombardment of Genoa by British ships and aircraft, his frail forces allocated by Hitler had been reduced by almost half.

But Rommel was not taken aback. Having ordered the remnants of the light division and everything that was left of the 15th tank division, they urgently loaded onto ships and proceeded to Tripoli. Follow one at a time, without attracting the attention of the British by convoy. Then, together with the German military attaché in Rome, Major General von Rintelen, Rommel went to Villa Torlonia, the Duce's palace, where Mussolini was received. Interrupting the exalted speech of the Duce, Rommel immediately turned the conversation into a practical channel, demanding the immediate resubordination of all the surviving generals of the African army to himself. The Duce promised, but, as always, did nothing. Directly from the Duce, Rommel flew to Sicily to the headquarters of the 10th Corps of the Luftwaffe. For a month of fighting, the corps has already lost about half of its vehicles. Of the remaining, a good third was in need of repair. Fuel remained inviolable supply. The Italians don't have any early warning service. British air strikes are constantly taken by surprise.

Rommel never paid attention to such cries of his subordinates. Having ordered General Geisler to prepare part of the forces for a flight to Africa and immediately begin large-scale operations against the main British supply base in Benghazi, Rommel flew to Tripoli on February 12 in a Junkers transport.

The Italians who accompanied him on the flight, apparently, sincerely hoped that the British would shoot down the plane of the frantic German general along the way and all the problems with this damned war would be solved on their own "because of the clear advantage of the enemy," to put it in a sports language. A camouflaged Ju-52 crept over the very water and, slipping under the very nose of the British, safely delivered Rommel to Tripoli on February 12. To his great amazement, Rommel learned that the British had stopped their advance on Tripoli. The 6th shock Australian division was transferred to Greece, the 7th armored division of England was loaded on transport in Alexandria, also heading to Greece. Most of the vehicles, artillery and anti-aircraft support were sent there,

ammunition and fuel. The front on the line El Agheila - Marada was occupied by the unfired 9th Australian incomplete division and the 2nd reserve armored division, planted, for lack of other materiel, on somehow repaired captured Italian tanks.

Joyfully accepting such a gift of fate, Rommel eagerly awaited the arrival of the first units of the German 5th Light Division, which was already expected on February 14, praying to God that the British would not intercept at sea and drown the single transports coming with such an invaluable cargo from Genoa and Tripoli.

It was on the very day when the squadron of Admiral Somerville, as the embodiment of invincible sea power, smashed the Genoese port, the captain of the 2nd rank Wolfgang Kahler, the senior artillery officer of the battleship Gneisenau, noticed a faint smoke on the horizon from the "crow's nest" on the mast. This was immediately reported to Scharnhorst. The ships of the detachment of Admiral Lutyens have been in the North Atlantic for the 6th day, but have not yet met

nobody.

On February 4, taking advantage of the snow charges that came from the Arctic, they managed to slip past the English patrol cruiser through the Danish Strait into the Atlantic without being noticed. Addressing the crew, Admiral Lutyens announced with a hint of triumph in his voice: "For the first time in history, it was today that German surface ships managed to break through the English blockade into the Atlantic. More success is ahead of you!"

On February 8, both battleships sailed on the parallel of the southern tip of Greenland, keeping thirty miles apart. A piercing cold wind was blowing, catching up with the oncoming wave that was crashing on the decks. Snowballs flying at times reduced visibility to zero.

The next morning, the wind abated slightly, and the ships began to search for prey. The available information was that convoy HX-105, which left Halifax on 31 January, was on a northeasterly course. Nothing was known about the security of the convoy. Lutyens planned to approach the convoy from the south on the Gneisenau, then taking it in pincers with the help of the Scharnhorst, which was supposed to appear from the north.

And at 08:30 on January 9, Captain 2nd Rank Kahler from the Gneisenau crow's nest noticed smoke on the horizon, and then the tips of the masts. The ships continued their approach, breaking through the raging waves, and at 09:47, at a distance of 17 miles, the navigator of the Scharnhorst, Captain 2nd Rank Helmut Gissler, identified the English battleship Remilles. It was an old low-speed (21 knots) ship built in 1916. He could not get away from the thirty-two knot German battleships and not catch up with them. But the old battleship carried eight fifteen-inch guns and, in the event of a battle, could smash both German ships to shreds.

As soon as the enemy was identified, Lutyens immediately ordered the action to be canceled, mindful of the order that categorically prescribed by all means to avoid combat with English ships and especially with battleships. The crews of the ships were disappointed and annoyed.

Giant waves swept over the battleships, crashing against the main battery towers, bridges and superstructures. Rolling reached 40 degrees, the bow of the ships went into the water along the superstructure. Anti-aircraft guns were damaged and mangled. The waves washed overboard almost all the ventilation rough. In the lower rooms - near the machines and boilers - people had nothing to breathe. They lost consciousness at combat posts. The detachment had been at sea for 17 days, without showing itself in any way. The weather continued to rage and Admiral Lutyens began to think about returning to Brest.

## Chapter 14

On February 15, 1941, the XVIII All-Union Conference of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks opened in Moscow, which lasted until February 20. Georgy Malenkov made a report at the party conference. The official topic of the report was the situation in industry and transport. And although the report, as it should be, was delivered in untranslatable "new language", its leitmotif was the demand to bring industry and transport to a state of full mobilization readiness. "Full mobilization readiness" - this phrase was constantly heard both in the report and in the debate. It was, of course, about enterprises working "for defense", although there were practically no other enterprises left in the Soviet Union. The entire industry of the country was turned by Stalin's global ambitions into a giant hammer, forging exclusively weapons in the embodiment of the slogan of the father of all nations: "Arm! Arm yourself! Arm yourself!"

In this tangle of poisonous snakes and deadly intrigues, into which the entire social, economic and political life of the country was turned, the squabble between the army and the military industry occupied one of the very first places in terms of ruthlessness and unscrupulousness. And as always, in the center of the squabble was the father of all peoples himself. Once, in a conversation with his favorite Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin remarked that during the years of the Civil War, he remembers, there was a very good 107-mm field gun. The Red Army soldiers loved her very much. Such a gun was easily transported by horses. Now, if now it would be installed on tanks? It would be great.

Since it was a field gun from the time of the civil war, it was naturally impossible to install it on a tank. But the idea of the leader was developed creatively. Zhdanov instructed the designers of the Kirov plant in Leningrad to create a 107-mm gun for the tank. Those were horrified. For such a gun, it was necessary to create a completely new tank, and not one that was already going into series. Moreover, an excellent 76-mm gun has already been created for serial tanks. Not to mention the fact that ammunition has not yet been created for this mythical 107-mm cannon.

Zhdanov, meanwhile, had already enlisted the support of Marshal Kulik, who served as head of the Main Artillery Directorate of the Red Army. Having learned who the "creator" of the 107-mm gun was, Kulik immediately gave the order to discontinue the production of the 76-mm gun and start manufacturing Stalin's favorite gun so that it could be installed on new tanks.

Upon learning of this, the People's Commissar for Armaments Boris Vannikov was horrified. He flatly refused to carry out the orders of Zhdanov and Kulik. A scandal erupted in which both sides naturally appealed to Stalin - this time not only as the father of all peoples, but also as the creator of a new tool.

For greater persuasiveness, Kulik fabricated a fake intelligence report that the Germans were re-equipping their tanks with a new 100-mm gun, which they did not even think of doing. Vannikov contacted the GRU and received an explanation that the German tanks mainly had 45 and 50 mm short-barreled guns, some had 75 mm. "It is unlikely," experts pointed out, "that the Germans could provide such a big leap in strengthening tank technology in a year" ...

Soon Vannikov was summoned to the leader.

He gloomily asked: "What do you say about the proposal to arm the tanks with a 107-mm cannon? Comrade Kulik says that you do not agree with him. And the guns are very good, I know them from the civil war ... "By this time, Vannikov himself already knew well where the wind was blowing

wind. But nevertheless, he found enough courage in himself to explain to Comrade Stalin in the mildest form all the absurdity of his unexpected initiative.

Stalin walked around the office behind Vannikov's back and listened.

At that moment, Zhdanov entered the room.

Seeing him, Stalin reproachfully said: "Vannikov does not want to make 107-mm guns for our Leningrad tanks. Such good guns, but he doesn't want to make them. Why?"

- Vannikov always resists everything, - the favorite played along with the "owner". – This is his style of work.

And he looked at the People's Commissar for Armaments with a look as if he was saying: "Got it, puppy, who are you going against?"

Vannikov tried to object again, but Stalin abruptly cut him off, saying that he knew all the explanations of the people's commissar: this was a reluctance bordering on sabotage to reorganize to produce new products, which harmed state interests and was pure sabotage.

The People's Commissar for Armaments went cold, deciding that he would be sent straight from the leader's office to the Lubyanka, which was very often practiced.

Stalin, going up to the pale Vannikov, who had hardly risen from his chair on wadded legs, said with a strong Georgian accent: "It is necessary that you do not interfere. Therefore, instruct the directors of enterprises to immediately stop the production of 45 and 76 mm guns and withdraw from the shops all equipment that cannot be used for the manufacture of 107 mm guns.

The issue was resolved, but Vannikov did not calm down. At a meeting of the state commission on this issue, he bluntly told Zhdanov: "You allow the disarmament of the army before the war!"

He didn't forget it.

They didn't forget him that back in 1937 Kulik gave material on Vannikov that allowed him to doubt his boundless devotion to Comrade Stalin, which allowed him, as well as any other, to be deleted from life at will. However, Vannikov himself did not remain in debt either and gave such murderous material against Kulik that Kulik had to be shot, and Vannikov himself was honored to die a natural death, having reached the age of sixty-five.

Sometimes the leader gave the People's Commissar for Armaments great confidence, informing Vannikov about the upcoming arrests and as if wanting to hear his opinion on this matter. Somehow, in mid-February 1941, Vannikov was honored to have dinner at Stalin's apartment. The leader was gloomy and taciturn, although usually, apparently, according to the old Caucasian tradition, there was very cheerful and talkative.

"Among the military engineers," Stalin finally said, "there were scoundrels. They will be arrested soon." And he gave Vannikov the list to familiarize himself with. Vannikov looked. His temples pounded. His close colleagues, the most valuable employees, outstanding creators of new weapons were appointed for destruction. Feeling the leader's gaze on him, the people's commissar silently nodded his head. Stalin took the list, folded it in four and put it in his jacket pocket. He did not show Vannikov the other list, which opened with his own name. But Vannikov could understand even without this that if in the near future his

closest collaborators, the NKVD would receive so many testimonies against him that there could be no doubt about his future fate. But such is the nature of a person who constantly lives under the sword of Damocles, that until the last second he hopes for a better lot. In this case, hope was given by the fact that the leader himself invited the People's Commissar of Arms to his place and showed him great confidence, familiarizing him with the list of the doomed.

Vannikov simply did not know Stalin well.

And who knew him well? Nobody.

Even those closest to him, paralyzed with fear and hypnotized by his will, had little to say to better understand the logic behind his thought process and decision-making. But after all, someone still deftly manipulated these processes? How did it happen that Stalin fully complied with all the points of the scenario of the Second World War, which he allegedly had no idea about? How much, in theory, the Americans should have paid him for his most brilliant dictum that "cybernetics is a Jewish science alien to Marxism," which ensured Americans dominance over the world for the foreseeable future.

What did the campaign "to combat cosmopolitanism" launched by him give, besides the final formation of the state of Israel and the sharp growth of Jewish capital with the simultaneous destruction of everything that still remained of the international labor movement.

Allen Dulles, attracted by William Donovan to work in American intelligence, even before the official entry of the United States into World War II, wrote an interesting note addressed to President Roosevelt, where he pointed out that the Achilles' heel of the Soviet Union was the departure from official "international socialism" to "National Communism" as a more monstrous form of German "National Socialism". In this case, Dulles pointed out, the Soviet Union would inevitably collapse and disintegrate into a dozen pseudo-independent states. To achieve this, it is only necessary to develop nationalist tendencies in Russia.

How did it happen that Stalin fulfilled almost everything that was mentioned in the note of the first director of the CIA?

There are no answers to these questions. Not yet, because no one has installed them yet. But it is not so difficult to understand them without even looking at the "Special Folders of the Politburo".

Even without assuming any malicious intent, it can be stated with confidence that when a person who does not even have a car license sits at the helm of a huge airliner, which is the state, this will inevitably lead to disaster, which happened.

Time bombs planted under our country, first by Lenin, and then by Comrade Stalin, having worked, smashed the Soviet Union to shreds, and God forbid that they did not smash Russia. But let's not get ahead of ourselves...

Meanwhile, General Proskurov was transferred to a special prison hospital and treated. Broken ribs and crushed fingers were mended. Doctors were more concerned about broken kidneys. Doctors believed that the former general would last a year and a half at most. And they recommended to the security officers to somewhat reduce the intensity of interrogations, warning that at each interrogation the former head of the GRU could die unexpectedly.

But how could the "intensity of interrogations" be reduced when, in all its glory,

another powerful military conspiracy was looming with the aim of a coup d'état and the restoration of the power of the landlords and capitalists.

The brain of the conspiracy was somewhere in the bowels of the General Staff, from where ominous threads led to the Air Force Directorate, to the People's Commissariat for Armaments, to the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Red Army and through the latter's agents to the capitals of a number of capitalist countries. First of all: Germany, England and Japan. Two investigative departments at Lubyanka worked around the clock, compiling lists of suspects, drawing diagrams and lines of communication, while seeing how sinister threads were woven into an equally sinister web, ready to cover the army and all the plans of the party and government, as it had already happened in the not so back in 1937, when all the global plans of Comrade Stalin were thwarted by conspirators who entangled the country in such a network, from which, it would seem, there was no way out. But the genius of Comrade Stalin then found a way out. He will find him now...

Secret Resolution of the Politburo

Special folder dated February 19, 1941

On the deployment of fronts on the basis of border military districts

"On the basis of the Leningrad Military District, the Baltic Special Military District, the Western Special Military District and the Kyiv Special Military District, create and deploy fronts and front headquarters.

... The created fronts will now be named accordingly:

1. On the basis of the LVO - Northern Front.
2. On the basis of PBOVO - the North-Western Front.
3. On the basis of ZPOVO - by the Western Front.
4. On the basis of KOVO - the South-Western Front ...

11. In connection with the absolute secrecy of this event, the district system is completely preserved and transferred to the deputy front commander for territorial administration, who, after the withdrawal of the front troops from the specified territory, takes full rights as the commander of the rear military district.

Endorsing this decision of the Politburo, Stalin said doubtfully to Zhukov: "The confusion will only begin, these headquarters will quarrel among themselves, to whom to give what orders. There will be no order."

The great leader, as if looking into the water. The idea was too complicated for the clumsy Soviet military machine. "We will put things in order," the new chief of the General Staff firmly promised, "there will be order. There is no other way, Comrade Stalin."

Stalin understood that it was impossible otherwise, but he himself was a little frightened by the scope of the undertakings. But I liked how ardently the new chief of the General Staff set to work.

And there was very little time left. We had to hurry.

Clever Dekanozov, through his agents in Berlin, obtained remarkable information about the schedule of German preparatory measures for the invasion of Great Britain this summer.

At the same time, it is planned to land several infantry and tank divisions on the coast of North Africa to inflict a decisive defeat on the British and force them out at the first stage beyond the line of the Suez Canal with the capture of Alexandria and Port Said.

In the very near future, German troops intend to strike at Greece with the aim of destroying the British expeditionary forces deployed there and seizing the islands of the Aegean, including Crete, where British bases have been established.

The first German infantry and tank units landed in the Libyan port of Tripoli under the command of the German general von Rommel (as in the text - I.B.), who had already deployed military headquarters in the desert.

Sources in the German Air Ministry emphasize that British intelligence has partially revealed the planned action plan of the German command and is actually already openly clinging to the last chance of salvation, which it sees in pitting the Soviet Union and Germany against each other.

Together with Dekanozov's message, Stalin received a certificate from the General Staff on the examination of a document called the Barbarossa Plan. A thorough study showed that "... this document cannot in any way represent a campaign plan developed by specialists in any General Staff. The plan lacks the general idea of the operation, the schedule of which is literally taken from the ceiling. It is noteworthy that three army groups ("North", "Center" and "South") are going to advance deep into the territory of the USSR in divergent directions, which no strategist could afford. In fact, the "Plan Barbarossa" is a very crude fake and is nothing more than a schedule for the introduction of troops of Kaiser Germany into the territory of the Baltic States, present-day Belarus and Ukraine in 1917-1918. after the collapse of the Eastern Front and the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

With this assessment of the "Plan Barbarossa", the head of the Information Department of the GRU, Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets, did not agree at all. Having received a copy of the document from General Golikov, the lieutenant colonel sat down to study it and came to the conclusion that the plan was not an English or someone else's fabrication. This is a genuine document, and everything indicates that the Germans have already begun to implement it.

"It's like you graduated from more than two academies," Golikov peacefully noted, not wanting to aggravate relations with his stubborn subordinate after Stalin's reaction to "Summary No. 8," and he didn't finish a simple school either. Look how the offensive is planned here: one group is rushing to Leningrad, the second - to Moscow, the third - to Kyiv. And every day they are further and further away from each other. Here, too, an offensive is envisaged from the territory of Romania, but there are no deployed forces at all. The troops are simply in transit through Romanian territory.

Golikov usually beat his subordinate with two "trump cards": the absence of German front-line headquarters on the Soviet border and the lack of winter uniforms among the Germans.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, however, had already found the headquarters of the army group near Warsaw, disguised as some sort of quartermaster's office. Moreover, 15 kilometers from Brest, his agents discovered the headquarters of the tank group, while mothballed.



The second front headquarters was discovered by the Rookie in the Tilsit area. In the same place, like a mushroom on a common mycelium, the headquarters of another tank group crouched. Both headquarters, of course, led a semi-lethargic existence, so as not to be discovered ahead of time.

Golikov, and with him the leadership of the General Staff, were inclined to think that these were temporary headquarters that controlled the transfer of troops in a southerly direction.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, in a special report addressed to the Chief of the General Staff, tried to prove that this was not so. Headquarters are clearly aimed to the east. He realized that this constant and powerful concentration of German troops on the border with the USSR would inevitably disrupt the Thunderstorm and, at best, create an incomprehensible stalemate, when both sides would lose even the theoretical possibility of achieving surprise and would be forced to mark time.

He proposed to strike without waiting for the transfer of the bulk of German troops to the West, which can never be expected at all, but to strike no later than the first days of April, when the German troops would be tied up with operations in Greece. A direct blow through Romania to Yugoslavia (which can and should be made allied) would cut off the German troops in Greece from those in Poland and East Prussia, which would be defeated according to the last corrected plan for January 1, 1941. The pedantic lieutenant colonel even drew a diagram of the upcoming hostilities.

The paper returned to the GRU with Zhukov's resolution: "Vol. Golikov. Moderate your militancy mended."

But the Rookie did not calm down and, on the basis of new data, compiled another report, proving that at least two of the three front-line headquarters deployed in the west, allegedly for the invasion of England, were fake.

There was no response to this paper. Perhaps Golikov intercepted her on the way. And it is possible that Zhukov read it and, as often happened to him, did not understand anything.

And here is Golikov's second "trump ace": why the Germans, if they are preparing to attack us, do not stock up on winter uniforms, even Lieutenant Colonel Rookie cannot be beaten could.

I searched for an answer to this question myself, but there was no answer.

Berlin, February 22, 1941 - 06:25.

Moscow, February 22, 1941 - 11:00.

Head of the diplomatic mission or his representative personally.

STATE SECRET.

TOP SECRET.

Must be transcribed personally.

No. 353 of 21 February.

In Telegraphic Instruction No. 36, dated January 7th, it was indicated that it was desirable to maintain vagueness in the reports of the number of German troops for some time, and that the full strength of the troops would be reported at the appropriate time. Now that time has come.

In Romania, 680,000 (six hundred and eighty thousand) German troops are on alert. Among them is a very high percentage of technical troops, especially armored forces, with the most modern weapons. In the rear of these troops, in Germany, there are inexhaustible reserves, including regular troops, concentrated on the German-Yugoslav border.

I ask the members of the diplomatic mission and possible confidants to begin in an acceptable way in impressive form to make known this force, indicating that it is more than enough to deal with any contingency in the Balkans from any side ...

Ritter"

It is not known who the Germans wanted to scare by spreading such rumors, although, as Soviet intelligence correctly determined, there were no more than 450 thousand of them in Romania. Four armies, 10 separate corps and 12 air divisions of the Kiev Special Military District hanging over the German flanks, already transformed into the Southwestern Front, outnumbered the German group by almost three times in terms of personnel and almost four times in terms of the number of tanks and aircraft.

And if we consider that two more armies were being formed in the North Caucasus for the Southwestern Front, then it is ridiculous to say that the German "leak" frightened someone in the Kremlin. Things have already reached the point that General Kirponos resolutely refused to command such a huge group and bombarded Moscow with projects to divide the Southwestern Front (in order to increase management efficiency) into two fronts: Southwestern and Southern. Zhukov found this idea worthy of discussion. Stalin remained silent, promising to think.

In matters of command and control, Stalin understood little and did not go into them much. Let the General Staff provide a justification, then we will decide.

Stalin was concerned with simpler, but from his point of view, important questions. Covert mobilization, which has been going on uninterruptedly since September 1939, has already brought the army to an unimaginable number in peacetime, approaching 8 million people. In addition to problems in the economic life of the country, which were partially resolved by the mass mobilization of women and adolescents into industry and agriculture, mobilization also gave rise to intra-army problems related to the management of such a huge mass of people. In particular, a rather severe shortage of lower-level commanders was revealed. In particular, commanders of platoons, companies and teams. Stalin consulted Timoshenko and Zhukov. The exit was found quickly. The question is, why should an infantry lieutenant study for two whole years, when everything he needs is given to him for the first six months of training?

Indeed, we need to think about transferring land military schools to six-month training. In the meantime, it is necessary to accelerate the release of 2 courses - and into operation!

Soviet newspapers commented in detail on Hitler's last public speech, in which the Fuhrer again, threatening England with terrible punishments, did not say a word about the Soviet Union.

It was understandable. All the Fuhrer's thoughts were occupied with the diplomatic game in the Balkans to force Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to join the Axis. Both countries clearly did not want this. Especially Bulgaria.

It was easier for Hitler. He could threaten a direct invasion with a preliminary aerial bombardment of Sofia, which had a terrible effect on the nervous and impressionable Tsar Boris.

However, Comrade Stalin had a lever of influence on the Bulgarians, however, by February 1941, the great leader had already managed to be almost completely disappointed in its effectiveness.

On one of the outskirts of Moscow at that time, near the Exhibition of Agricultural Achievements, in the quiet of a park, there was a solid four-story mansion house built in the late 30s in the architectural style of the "early Stalinist empire". The Executive Committee of the Comintern settled in this house, the chairman of which was Georgy Dimitrov, the hero of the sensational Leipzig trial in his time, a Bulgarian by birth.

Long gone are the days when the noisy congresses of the Comintern were held in German, and the delegates, rejoicing, left Moscow with suitcases stuffed with gold, diamonds and currency. When the secretary of the Comintern - the charming Anzhelika Balabanova - the common mistress of Lenin and Mussolini - received whole boxes full of pounds, francs and dollars with Lenin's invariable instructions "do not hesitate to spend any money on our common cause." When the world revolution was about to transfer all power in the world to the Kremlin adventurers.

No one remembered these times and no one dared to remember.

Comrade Stalin inflicted such a rout on the Comintern, before which all the Bartholomew nights of history faded. Of the once powerful and representative "Russian section of the Comintern", only Kalinin was lucky enough to die in his own bed. With few exceptions, the same fate befell foreigners. As a result, by the mid-1930s, the Comintern had turned into an ordinary division of the NKVD, something in between a department and management, with its own, like every department, specific tasks.

The tasks solved by the executive committee of the Comintern were constantly narrowed, and after the shameful failure of the Spanish adventure, they were reduced to a minimum.

For some time, a propaganda department also worked under the executive committee of the Comintern. One of the most high-profile cases of propagandists was the operation carried out by the German Comintern Maria Osten, who, during a period of particularly bad relations between Stalin and Hitler, brought a ten-year-old German boy Hubert Loste to the USSR from Germany and concocted the then sensational book "Hubert in Wonderland", where the German boy did not cease to rejoice violently at everything he saw in the USSR, while cursing everything that he left in his homeland. The preface to this book was written by Georgy Dimitrov himself. This book was read aloud in schools and pioneer houses, on the radio, and excerpts were published in newspapers. The photograph of Hubert himself took pride of place among other "pioneer heroes" next to the photograph of Pavlik Morozov. After the signing of the pact in 1939, the whole operation lost its meaning. The "writer" Maria Osten was shot as a "German spy", and the unfortunate Hubert Loste was sent to the Gulag, where he died.

Almost the same fate awaited the American juvenile delinquent Harry Eisman, who was brought to the USSR just at the moment when the angry American Themis, despite all its democratic nature, wanted to give the youth a full prison term for street robbery and attacking policemen. Harry was carried around the country in triumph, hysterical rallies were held in his honor, where a young fighter against capitalism made fiery speeches.

Finally, everyone got tired of him, was accused of espionage and sent to the Gulag, where he spent seven years. All the Comintern members who organized his delivery to the Union were, out of harm's way, shot ...

By the end of February 1941, among the unexecuted leaders of the Comintern, there were Georgy Dimitrov, Joseph Tito and a dozen or two small-scale adventurers whom the leader of all peoples intended to carry in the Thunderstorm wagon train and, as he moved to the West, put them on small dictatorial thrones in their respective countries, fine realizing that even on these thrones it will never be too late to shoot them, if necessary.

There was the option of receiving a call for help from the true people's government of Bulgaria, headed, of course, by Comrade Dimitrov and intercepted by radio.

Dimitrov swore to the great leader that he would organize everything. They met quite recently, on February 18, when Stalin summoned the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Comintern to his dacha. The hospitable leader, although he personally poured kharkho into plates, and "Kakheti" into glasses, listened with doubt on his face. General Zhukov has already managed to enlighten the leader that nothing good can be expected from the proletariat, especially the European one. The idlers from the Comintern have been fooling us for more than twenty years, and have not been able to organize a single proletarian uprising, on which the entire offensive doctrine of the Red Army was based.

It is necessary, Zhukov pointed out, not to get in touch with these swindlers, but directly with the general staffs, offering them concrete assistance.

Zhukov, using the contacts of the GRU and the NKVD, had already established contact with the general staffs of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian military, in the euphoria of Slavic solidarity, directly told Zhukov that if the Soviet Union had managed to send its troops into Bulgaria before the Germans, no problems would have arisen. The army would always convince both the tsar and the prime minister that this was the best way out. The fact that with this "best way out" all of them would have to go straight to the Gulag or stand against the wall, none of them foresaw, and Zhukov's envoys, of course, did not explain. The main thing was different: at this stage, it was not possible to send troops to Bulgaria.

On March 1, 1941, in Vienna, Bulgarian Prime Minister Professor Filov signed an act on the accession of his country to the Tripartite Pact. The signing took place solemnly in the presence of Hitler, who honored the Bulgarian prime minister with a handshake and a few words about the traditional and principled position of Bulgaria in relation to pan-Slavism and other nonsense associated with Slavic solidarity. On the part of the Germans, the contract was signed by Ribbentrop, on the part of the Italians, Mussolini's son-in-law, Count Ciano. Dressed in a simple civilian suit, Filov did not look good against the background of his militant colleagues, who flaunted in a brilliant uniform.

Before the signature of the Bulgarian professor-premier had dried up, German tanks and motorized infantry moved along the bridges across the Danube.

The Junkers, lined up in a crane wedge, blackened in the Bulgarian sky, roaring their engines low over Sofia, either welcoming a new ally, or making it clear what would await the Bulgarians if they were less accommodating.

On the same day, the German Foreign Office received a telegram from Schulenburg, relayed to the train on which Hitler and Ribbentrop were returning from Vienna.

"No. 444 of February 28. Received March 1, 1941 - 02:10.

Urgently! To telegram No. 403 of 27 February.

I visited Mr. Molotov this evening and followed instruction No. 1. Molotov received my message with understandable anxiety and stated: "... the opinion of the Soviet government that Bulgaria is part of the USSR security zone remains unchanged."

While the whole world was learning from newspaper reports that the two major European predators were beginning to publicly snarl at each other for the first time over undivided prey, the fact that the new American ambassador, John Wynant, had arrived in London went almost unnoticed. Few people paid attention to the fact that on the platform of the station, contrary to protocol and traditional etiquette, the ambassador was met not even by Churchill, but by the King of Great Britain George VI himself, dressed in military uniform. No one has ever been given such an honor.

The Ambassador informed Churchill that the Lend-Lease Act would be approved by Congress within the next two weeks. Unforeseen accidents are practically excluded. In the near future, the special envoy of the American President to Lend-Lease, Mr. Harriman, will arrive in England in the rank of envoy.

Some delay in the adoption of the law on "Lend-Lease" was caused by fierce disputes around one phrase of the law in question, which stated that "Lend-Lease" could be extended to "

any country whose defense the President considers vital to the defense of the United States."

So far it was about the UK, Greece and China - everything went well and smoothly. And then, as Winant told Churchill, one of the Republicans asked if such a phrase in the law meant that American assistance could be provided, for example, to the Soviet Union, if the president so decided.

- Why not? Roosevelt shrugged.

Republicans and isolationists have thrown a scandal. The congressional chamber was resounded with their far from parliamentary cries. All of America will be horrified even at the mere thought that the American taxpayer can be forced to pay for some of the next adventures of Stalin and his Red Army!

On this issue, the opposition launched a real battle, and some advisers to Roosevelt urged him to agree to a compromise solution that would exclude the Soviet Union. But the President was firm. The Barbarossa plan was in his safe, and he believed that everything would happen exactly as it was written in this plan. And if that happens, the USSR will desperately need American help.

Do you think they'll still get along? Churchill asked the new ambassador, who, unlike his predecessor, the old Joseph Kennedy, was much more resolute and spoke more than was silent.

"At least the president is absolutely sure of it," Wynant replied. "Our guys in Berlin obtained a plan of attack on Stalin signed by Adolf. Bill Donovan claims that some of his guys in Moscow saw a similar plan to attack Germany, signed by Stalin himself. So they will definitely clash and I would like to save us from additional headaches so that this happens faster and

the first move was made in Berlin. Otherwise, both you and we would not have to deal with the red version of Operation Sea Lion.

By this time, the British, of course, also already knew about the Barbarossa plan. The British also knew about Stalin's plans, sealed in red envelopes with the inscription: "Open upon receipt of the Thunderstorm signal. They also knew in London that the "Thunderstorm" signal would follow after the Wehrmacht invaded the English Isles. And although the entire British leadership was well aware that such a landing would never happen, they became more and more convinced every day of the obvious shift in Hitler's strategy against England. And the intensification of the naval war, and the transfer of troops to North Africa, and the transfer of aviation to Sicily, and the obvious preparation of a strike against Greece - all indicated that Hitler defiantly defines England as the main enemy. But the ports of northern France and Norway and the territories adjacent to them, declared by the Germans a closed zone, were empty. There was no concentration of troops there. Another incomprehensible phenomenon was noted: German torpedo boats, going at full speed along

English Channel, were in active radio communication with some incomprehensible radio station in Le Havre, posing as the headquarters of the army group. Undercover intelligence reported that no army group headquarters was deployed in Le Havre and its environs. What is it: working out the control of landing forces or some kind of another hoax?

"The president is only afraid," the new American ambassador laughed, "that Hitler will get stuck in Greece and will not have time to tell Stalin everything he thinks about him this year. As far as we know, you have already assembled a whole expeditionary force of 50 thousand people there. And your soldiers are famous for the fact that behind any wooden fence they can defend themselves for

several years.

"The president is afraid," Wynant went on, that if he gets stuck in Greece, "completely unforeseen events may occur. However, I convey to you the President's opinion. I'm not very good at these things myself. But you know as well as I do that today German troops entered Bulgaria.

The entry of German troops into Bulgaria was not a surprise to anyone, and even more so to Churchill. He had been waiting for this event for a long time, even when he received a message about the invasion of the Italian army in Greece. And since then he has been trying to organize a trap for the Germans in the Balkans.

Churchill planned to forge an alliance of Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey to resist Hitler, promising immediate assistance from the British air force and navy.

Turkey did not want to interfere in anything, fearing both Germans and Russians equally. Especially Russians. The Soviet troops in Transcaucasia frankly surveyed Turkish territory, conducted reconnaissance of the area, and the nature of their exercises left no doubt where they were going to attack and what their plans were. The unexpected transfer of three Soviet mountain rifle divisions from Transcaucasia to Ukraine, where, as you know, there were no mountains, rather surprised the Turks, but did not calm them down.

Contact with the Germans was no less dangerous. Most recently, Churchill sent a special message to Turkish President İnönü, where, in particular, he wrote:

"The rapidly growing threat to Turkey and British interests compels me, Mr. President, to address you directly. The German squadrons only need to fly from their airfields in Romania to the bases being prepared for them in Bulgaria, and they can immediately join the battle. Then ... the Germans will fully control all exits from the Dardanelles and thus achieve the complete encirclement of Turkey in Europe from three sides ... Therefore, I propose, Mr. President, that we take the same measures for the defense of Turkey that the Germans are taking on Bulgarian airfields ... "

The answer from Ankara was more reminiscent of the muffled groan of a seriously ill person who asks for only one thing - to let him die in peace.

With Yugoslavia, things also did not go well. Prince Pavel, the regent of the kingdom, did not want to get involved with anyone at all, making efforts only to preserve the integrity of his state. Fear reigned in Belgrade. All proposals by the British were recoiled with horror. Prince Paul could not even make up his mind to receive the British Foreign Minister Eden in Belgrade.

On February 14, Cvetkovic and Markovic were summoned to Hitler's headquarters in Berchtesgaden. Having said a few words about the invincibility of the German army, Hitler made it clear to the Yugoslavs that they had nowhere to go, especially emphasizing the close interaction between Berlin and Moscow. In this regard, Hitler invited Yugoslavia to join the Tripartite Pact, promising in return for an attack on Greece not to transfer its troops through the territory of Yugoslavia, but to use its lines of communication only for the transport of military materials. The ministers returned to Belgrade completely unsure of what to do in the current situation. Joining the Axis powers could cause resentment and revolt in Serbia. War with Germany - split with Croatia.

Nevertheless, Churchill was still trying to forge his illusory alliance by sending Yugoslav Prime Minister Cvetkovic a remarkable letter that read:

"Your Excellency! The complete defeat of Hitler and Mussolini is ultimately inevitable. No sane and far-sighted person can doubt this after the British and American democracies have expressed their determination to achieve this defeat. There are only 65 million evil Huns in the world, and most of them are now busy suppressing the Austrians, Czechs, Poles and many other ancient peoples, which they terrorize and plunder. The population of the British Empire and the United States reaches almost 200 million people, even if you count only the mother countries and British dominions. We have undisputed dominance at sea and, with the help of America, we will soon achieve decisive superiority in the air as well.

If Yugoslavia and Turkey take their place alongside Greece and use all the help that the British Empire can give them, then the German plague will be ended and the same complete and decisive victory will be won as in the last war.

To be frank, Churchill expected little from the Yugoslav government represented by Regent Pavel, Cvetković and Marković. He hoped that this letter would inspire General Simović, Commander of the Yugoslav Air Force and Acting Chief of the General Staff.

Fifty-nine-year-old General Dusan Simonovich was a participant in the Balkan and World War I. A deep strategist, the author of a number of theoretical works on military art, he did not consider the position of the Yugoslav army so hopeless. Yugoslavia could deploy three army groups, seven field armies, 28 infantry, three cavalry divisions and 5 separate special forces brigades, whose operations could support more than 150 tanks and 415 aircraft. These forces, of course, were not enough to defeat the Wehrmacht, but quite enough to give the Germans a decent meeting.

The militant and valiant Serbs, from whose territory the First World War broke out at one time, did not want to capitulate, and a conspiracy of patriotic officers grouped around General Simovich, who preferred death to the shame of surrender and prepared a rebellion with the aim of overthrowing the government. The network of conspiracy spread from Belgrade to

the main garrisons in Zagreb, Skopje and Sarajevo.

British and American intelligence services were already operating around Simovich, and Soviet intelligence was already breathing hotly in the back of their heads. Churchill understood well what John Wynant was hinting at.

The Americans proposed to stop the mouse fuss in the Balkans, and to engage in the implementation of truly global plans. When these plans are implemented, Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey will automatically be in our pocket.

- Ours or yours? Churchill asked.

"I don't see much of a difference," Wynant laughed.

But Churchill, who thought in imperial terms, saw this difference very well. The Great British Empire was itself becoming part of some new and more powerful empire.

Molotov did his best to make it clear to Count von Schulenburg that the Soviet Union was extremely dissatisfied with the entry of German troops into Bulgaria, where Soviet troops were supposed to enter. But just as recently Stalin snatched Bessarabia and Bukovina right from under Hitler's nose, so Hitler dragged Bulgaria out from under Stalin's nose.

"The Soviet government," declared Molotov, "repeatedly emphasized to the German government, both during the Berlin negotiations and later, its

particular interest in Bulgaria.

Consequently, it cannot remain indifferent to the latest German measures and will have to determine its attitude towards them.

Molotov took a sheet of paper and, right in the presence of Schulenburg, wrote the Note with his own hand. It was immediately issued as it should be and handed over to the ambassador.

The note said:

"1. It is regrettable that, despite the warning from the Soviet government contained in the statement of November 25, 1940, the government of the German Empire found it possible to pursue a course that was detrimental to the security interests of the USSR and decided to carry out a military occupation of Bulgaria.

2. Since the Soviet government still holds the positions described in the statement of November 25, the German government must understand that it cannot count on the support of the USSR in relation to its measures in Bulgaria.

Schulenburg skimmed through the memorandum, shrugged his shoulders and again assured Molotov that in this action of the German government there was not even a hint of damage to the security interests of the Soviet Union.

On that they parted.

Even less restrained was Molotov's deputy Andrei Vyshinsky, who received a Bulgarian envoy who made a similar statement and tried to assure the prosecutor of the innocence of his country, which acted solely "in the name of maintaining peace in the Balkans." In his harsh, raspy voice, in which he usually read death sentences, Vyshinsky declared: "We believe that this will simply expand the conflict area by



Balkans. How many times have we suggested that you do the same! And you twisted, twirled and twisted. Live now under the Germans!"

The Soviet press was much more restrained. She simply stated what happened, refraining from any comments.

On March 2, 1941, Pravda (on the 4th page) gave three lines under the heading: "Bulgaria's accession to the three-power pact."

The Soviet Union is not happy! Very displeased!

Stalin, on the other hand, is in a very good mood. At the next report, Timoshenko and Zhukov brought him a number of new documents for approval. One can feel the firm hand of the new chief of the General Staff. Such an offensive impulse emanates from the documents themselves that it captures all those present and Comrade Stalin himself has to lightly upset his military comrades so that they do not break off the lines with their dashing and turn the entire state chariot over.

Even from the orders of People's Commissar Timoshenko breathed something new. Truly Bolshevik dynamism.

It was not for nothing that the 18th Party Conference gave Comrade Zhukov the greatest honor and confidence by making him a member of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks.

A member of the Central Committee, the chief of the General Staff is not a district commander who, from his command post, is not supposed to see anything further than his trenches. This is already a statesman, and he should think differently, in a stately way.

Comrade Stalin hinted that the army was corrupted by outdated propaganda that the enemy would definitely attack the USSR and then there would be war, otherwise the Soviet people would enjoy eternal peace.

Comrade Zhukov understood the hint: reports were laid on the leader's table, as a result of which Shcherbakov was appointed the new head of the GlavPURA of the Red Army and Comrade Zaporozhets was appointed the head of propaganda and agitation. Together with the General Staff, they edited and brought to Stalin a document that was a pleasure to read.

The document was called:

On political activities with the Red Army men and junior commanders of the Red Army for the summer period of 1941.

... Many political workers and group leaders of political studies have forgotten Lenin's well-known position that "as soon as we are strong enough to defeat all capitalism, we will immediately grab it by the collar."

The following interpretation is sometimes given about just and unjust wars: if a country is the first to attack another and wage an offensive war, then this war is considered unjust ...

From this it is concluded that the alleged Red Army will only conduct a defensive

war, forgetting the truth that any war waged by the Soviet Union will be a JUST war."

And Stalin gladly made an addition: "To work in the troops no later than May 15."

Another document. As soon as Comrade Stalin reproached the military for the fact that the training of cadets in land schools takes an unacceptably long time, this disgrace was immediately corrected.

But the nice thing is that the comrades showed real party initiative and got to the flight schools.<sup>566</sup>

It was order No. 080 of March 3, 1941:

On the establishment of a training system and the procedure for recruiting universities of the Air Force and improving the quality of training of flight and technical personnel.

In pursuance of the decision of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks of February 25, 1941:

1. Establish the following system for training the flight personnel ... of the Red Army Air Force:

..2. School of military pilots. Duration of training: in peacetime - 9 months, in wartime - 6 months.

The task of the school is to teach the cadet-pilot: piloting and using a combat aircraft during the day in simple meteorological conditions; group flights as part of a link and give practice in cross-country flights, landing at unfamiliar airfields, for which purpose include 10 such flights in the program ...

Establish in the schools of military pilots the total flight time per cadet in training and combat aircraft:

a) for bombers - 20 hours,

b) for fighters - 24 hours.

This order can be considered very advanced for its time, if we remember that even the Japanese, in desperate attempts to stop the American offensive, who created the kamikaze corps in October 1944, even allowed their suicide bombers to fly 30 hours of flying time. And this order is dated March 3, 1941. The priority is undoubted, and if we also remember that the pilots were first deprived of their officer ranks, and then in flight school started

forced recruitment, then they were forbidden to marry, it must be admitted that the Japanese with their "kamikaze" were far from what Comrade Stalin planned in 1941! Clouds of suicide bombers would appear over Europe, clogging the entire territory of the unfortunate continent with the wreckage of their machines. After all, flight schools did not keep pace with the conveyor production of combat aircraft.

However, the stormy activity of General Zhukov in transforming the country's military schools and

High-speed incubators of suicide bombers ran into strong resistance from the people's commissar of the Navy, Admiral Kuznetsov, who categorically did not want to transfer naval schools to a two-year period of training in peacetime and one-year in wartime. Zhukov absolutely did not understand what it is possible to teach a person for as much as 5 (five) years? Lead ships? A tank, for example, is no worse, but they learn to drive in six months, and if you try, you can teach in 2 months. Naturally, both appealed to Stalin, who also considered the five-year training period for naval officers to be excessive. After all, it is possible to revise the training programs? Why, for example, do schools have so much mathematics? What about astronomy? Well, of course, you need it, no one argues. But why so many?

Admiral Kuznetsov understood that he could not explain anything to these people. And he asked Comrade Stalin to release him from the post of people's commissar.

"Don't scare us, Comrade Kuznetsov," Stalin said in a low voice. - When necessary, we will remove you. We'll take pictures without your request."

And he kept his word, as always, but a little later.

And lagged behind with schools. The sailors continued to study in full. Zhukov's proposal to replenish the ranks of officers of the fleet through the promotion of officers of foremen of extra-long service did not pass either. Another proposal did not pass either: to release chief petty officers, not officers, from naval schools. Like in aviation.

This was the first battle between Admiral Kuznetsov and Zhukov.

But Kuznetsov was not the only one who openly rebelled against the rude (whatever it took!) and illiterate measures of the new Chief of the General Staff. The next was Colonel General Stern, Zhukov's former chief during the fighting at Khalkhin Gol.

Apparently, hurt that his subordinate had taken such a high post, Stern did not hide his negative attitude towards Zhukov, irritably telling how he, Stern, saved the situation at Khalkhin Gol, where without his help Zhukov would have suffered a crushing defeat. As he wrote the report that Zhukov read at a military conference in December last year, which Comrade Stalin liked so much, and much more that invariably accumulates in the soul of the offended and bypassed.

All this, of course, reached Stalin, and he asked Zhukov what his relationship was with Colonel General Stern. Zhukov replied that General Stern, having assumed the post of head of the Air Defense Directorate of the Red Army, considered the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of January 20, 1941 "On the organization of air defense" and the order of the People's Commissar No. 0015 of February 14 of this year "On the division of the territory of the USSR into zones, regions and air defense points" almost wrecking and is not going to fulfill them. Incidentally, he is supported in this by the head of the Air Force Directorate, Rychagov.

Stalin did not call Stern to himself, but he found out his opinion. Stern believed that such orders and decrees on air defense make the entire territory of the USSR virtually defenseless from air raids by any enemy, whether it be the Luftwaffe about to bomb Kiev, Sevastopol, Minsk or Riga, whether it be the British about to bomb Baku, or the Japanese aiming at Vladivostok and Khabarovsk. The concentration of the main aviation forces at the westernmost border is not justified by any prerequisites, regardless of whether we are going to attack or defend. He was also supported by Rychagov, who had clearly expressed his dissatisfaction lately. The change in the rules for serving in the Air Force and the redrawing of training programs on the go led to a sharply increased accident rate, reaching almost 11% instead of a tolerable three. "Well, is it possible to forcibly drive someone into aviation?" - exclaimed Rychagov, although at a meeting with Stalin, when this issue was discussed, he was completely (and completely) for, since he quickly

understood exactly what Stalin wanted.

Stalin always experienced army squabbles most acutely. Even sharper than in the NKVD. People must work together, rallying around the Central Committee. And they create problems. There is a person - there is a problem. There is no escape from the first part of the most ingenious of the social laws discovered by him. There is no escape from the second ...

Stalin's enormous capacity for work and his enormous power were by no means always spent exclusively on solving military, punitive and other issues related to the conduct of a misanthropic domestic policy and a predatory foreign one.

There were other questions as well.

For example, it was today that Stalin took the time to look at the documents sent to him from the Department of Socialist Culture under the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks. It was about the permission of the expedition of the Leningrad State Hermitage under the leadership of academician Orbeli to open in Samarkand the tomb of the greatest of the conquerors of the Middle Ages, the legendary Tamerlane. The initiator of this idea was, of course, the NKVD, which had information that countless treasures were immured in the tomb of one of the dreamers of world domination, which is Tamerlane. And Stalin was infected with treasure hunting from Lenin, who also knew a lot about such matters.

A historical note was attached to the documents, which indicated that there was an old legend, not even a legend, but a kind of belief that goes back to the 14th century and warns anyone who dares to open the grave of Tamerlane that, having done this, he will release himself into his country terrible demon of a bloody and devastating war.

Stalin realized that it was precisely because of this certificate that the documents ended up on his desk. No one could take responsibility and ignore the historical background. You teach people, you teach, but they remain superstitious, they believe in various women's fairy tales. The NKVD constantly reported on numerous arrests, especially in remote villages, for spreading absurd, anti-Soviet rumors, implicated in religious prejudices, about the country's approach to some kind of another catastrophe associated with some new invasion, similar to the invasion of Batu Khan. Then a naked maiden will come out of the forest and begin to prophesy before the collective farmers that "great troubles are coming and the fire will swallow the villages and fields"; then a boy in white will appear among the crosses in some cemetery and tears will roll from his clear eyes; then an old man in a shroud with a long gray beard and a staff will appear on the ruins of some demolished church and loudly announce "death, pestilence and famine" for your sins. Of course, none of these elders and youths could be captured, but those who spread these prophecies received full sentences - up to 10 years in special camps without the right to correspond. Stalin once again re-read the historical reference, grinned, dipped a pen into the inkwell (he did not recognize fountain pens - the old school!) and imposed a resolution: "T. Orbeli! Not later than May, begin work on opening the tomb of Timur in Samarkand. I. Stalin.

As his mother rightly said at their last meeting: "It would be better if you became a priest" ...

The Soviet embassy in Berlin has repeatedly drawn the attention of the German Foreign Ministry to the fact that there is no bomb shelter at the embassy, and the frequent attacks of British bombers on the city are forcing the embassy personnel, among whom there are women and children, to seek shelter in the nearest metro stations and in temporary air gaps in parks and on the boulevards.

The Germans reacted to this problem with understanding, and the new bomb shelter by the end of February

was almost ready.

The once brilliant and noisy diplomatic life in Berlin has faded. The embassy mansions, their windows covered with blackout curtains, seemed uninhabited. The big reception, which, according to tradition, the German government arranged for the diplomatic corps on the first day of the New Year, was this time canceled "on the occasion of the war." The head of the Reich Chancellery, Hans Lammers, read out to the diplomats the congratulations of the German government on behalf of the Reich Chancellor and forced them to sign in a special book that the congratulations had been received.

Diplomats accredited in Berlin dealt more with each other than with the German Foreign Office, endlessly arranging all sorts of parties, the main purpose of which was to obtain the necessary information, even at the level of mere rumors. And in the first months of 1941, a great many rumors circulated in Berlin, mainly about the prospects for the further course of the war. When will the invasion of England begin? Will the United States enter the war soon? Will the neutrality of Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey be violated? What are the future plans of the Soviet Union? The plans of the Soviet Union were of most interest, since almost daily British and American newspapers, with references either to news agencies or to some mysterious sources "close to the Kremlin", published extensive materials about the grandiose military preparations of the USSR on the German border and about the preparation by Stalin sudden attack on Germany. German newspapers diligently reprinted these materials, and the first secretary of the Soviet embassy, Valentin Berezhkov, was regularly summoned to the Foreign Ministry for explanations, emphasizing that all this overshadows "Soviet-German relations." Berezhkov reasonably replied that the Soviet government could not be held responsible for the provocations of the reactionary, bourgeois publications.

Moscow was extremely alarmed by the hype in the "reactionary bourgeois press", and a strict order flew to Berlin to find out the sources of the leak.

The Soviet embassy in Berlin was frankly doing nothing else but espionage and disinformation. Even business executives regulating economic deliveries were involved in these games, as well as members of various joint commissions and subcommissions, which bred like ants after the signing of the friendship treaty in September 1939.

What rarely happens in diplomatic practice, the intelligence network in Germany was headed by Ambassador Vladimir Dekanozov himself, who knew nothing about diplomacy, but a professional Chekist who for a long time headed intelligence (Foreign Department) of the NKVD. In Berlin, he led and coordinated the work of both branches of intelligence: both through the NKVD and through the GRU.

The first secretary of the embassy, Valentin Berezhkov, a confidant of Stalin and Molotov, who had the right to report through the head of the ambassador directly to Stalin's apparatus, was also a professional intelligence officer. Graceful and elegant, able to win over at diplomatic receptions, he had a special task of obtaining information in diplomatic circles and spreading the necessary disinformation.

The NKVD residency was headed by the 2nd secretary of the embassy Amayak Kobulov - the brother of the famous deputy Beria - Bogdan Kobulov. In fact, since January 1941, Alexander Korotkov, who developed a feverish, semi-legal activity, was considered the second resident at the embassy.

The press attache of the embassy, Alexander Smirnov (future USSR ambassador to Iran), was also engaged in intelligence, obtaining very important information surrounded by the Minister of Propaganda

Germany Dr. Goebbels.

The interests of the GRU were represented by the military attaché, Major General Tupikov, and the naval attaché, Rear Admiral Vorontsov, who had his own intelligence network, no less than the network of the NKVD.

The Gestapo practically did not interfere with the actions of the Soviet residency, which the Moscow embassy turned into. On the contrary, it unleashed such an avalanche of disinformation on Stalin's spies that flooded them with their heads and did not allow them to emerge even for many years after the end of the war.

Ambassador Vladimir Dekanozov himself moved in the highest circles of Nazi society, and more often with Reichsmarschall Goering, who received the Soviet plenipotentiary at his medieval luxury-furnished estate, Carinhall. In a spacious office hung with paintings by Renaissance masters, the small, frail Dekanozov in a three-piece suit and the majestic Goering in the uniform of the Reichsmarschall invented especially for him were having a leisurely conversation. Together, against the background of each other, they looked very comical and probably could have made an excellent pop couple, if fate had been at least a little more merciful to both of them.

Showing Dekanozov an American newspaper with a large headline "Stalin's steamroller is preparing to crush Germany," Goering shook his head smiling and remarked that the British and Americans would have given a lot for this to happen in reality. They sleep and see in order to pit the first socialist countries in the world against each other in the name of saving their rotten society and a completely anti-people state system. In the summer, the Fuhrer is going to put an end to this issue. The day before, the Fuhrer showed Goering a draft directive "On special jurisdiction in the zone of action of the Barbarossa plan, which provides for the release of Wehrmacht military personnel from any criminal liability for robberies and murders of civilians on the territory of the Soviet Union. We are talking about the destruction of ideology," the Fuhrer explained. And Dekanozov personally took part in the preparation of an extensive document on the extermination and deportation of civilians in the Baltics.

Now Dekanozov told Goering that he personally had always been a supporter of not only a political, but also a military alliance between the USSR and Germany. In a military alliance, he explained, we would be absolutely invincible. It is even hard to imagine what would have happened if the combat potentials of the USSR and Germany had merged into a single military alliance! Isn't this what Kaiser Wilhelm II dreamed of?

Indeed, Goering brightened up, what, in essence, separates us? Just a different interpretation of the concept of "socialism". We are for national socialism, you are for international. You are for the total nationalization of the economy and trade, we prefer to have a multi-structural one. But, my dear ambassador, I assure you and you will see in time that we were right, not you. There is no internationalism in the world. The Jews came up with this, and if they had their own state, they would not be internationalists. And you will inevitably come to the same. You will discard Jewish internationalism and come to Russian nationalism, as we came to German. One people, one Reich, one leader!

Dekanozov himself is Armenian by nationality, i.e. belongs to a national minority that has been persecuted and exterminated for centuries no less than the Jews. Stalin and Beria, Georgians, are also representatives of a national minority who were subjected to genocide from all sides: from the Mongols, and from the Turks, and from the Persians, who lost their independence behind the palisade of Russian bayonets in order to save their nation from total extermination. Meanwhile, the ideas that Dekanozov gleaned from conversations with Goering and other Nazi leaders and

forwarded in secret dispatches to Moscow, found a lively response in Stalin's heart [76].

However, Dekanozov was interested in Goering not so much as a socialist theorist, but as the commander-in-chief of the type of armed forces that currently bear the brunt of the war against England on their shoulders. A special gallery was equipped in the estate, where portraits of pilots who laid down their heads in the battle over Britain hung in solemn military mourning decoration. From time to time, during the conversation, adjutants entered the office, clicked their heels, apologized and passed on urgent reports to the Reichsmarschall. It happened that Goering himself, having run through the next paper with his eyes, apologized to Dekanozov and urgently left somewhere.

Yes, Goering admitted, the British turned out to be much stronger than we expected. But their cause is somehow lost. As long as the United States sways, the British will be finished. Their crushing was not easy for us. At present, we are forced to hold against them, in anticipation of the final blow, practically all the available forces of the Luftwaffe. And if you (here Goering smiled thinly) were really going to attack us, as the newspapers write about it, you would be convinced that in the East we have practically no air connections. There are really a lot of soldiers there, since parts of the invasion of England are formed there away from the prying eyes of their intelligence.

There is another problem, continued the Reichsmarschall, which I will tell you, Ambassador, solely in the hope of your well-known decency and ability to keep delicate secrets. The war with England is very unpopular with the German people. In all strata of society. After all, we are blood brothers. We relate almost the same way as Russians and Ukrainians. You are the family of the Slavic peoples, and we, the English and the Scandinavians, are the family of the Germanic peoples. And if today we are talking about the final destruction of England, then please do not think that we are talking about their extermination. Not at all! It is only about their return to the family of Germanic peoples...

While the Soviet ambassador had pleasant, useful and mutually enriching conversations with the leaders of the Third Reich, his subordinates also worked tirelessly.

Valentin Berezhkov was the constant person representing the USSR Embassy at all diplomatic events. All the Berlin bohemia was also present, languishing with boredom in the puritanical restrictions of wartime: the charming Olga Chekhova, a movie star, from whom all Nazi bosses were thrilled, starting with Hitler himself, who invariably invited the niece of the great classic of Russian literature to all celebrations in the imperial office; aristocratically cold Pola Negri - mistress of the thoughts of the Berlin beau monde; irresistible Willy Forst - the dream of all girls in Germany and many others. But diplomats paid little attention to the beauty of movie stars and operetta divas. There was a war, and they were in the service, making it their main task to extract more information from each other.

Most of all, Berezhkov liked to talk with the talkative Turkish ambassador Gerede. Now, after the entry of German troops into Bulgaria, the information of the Turk could be the most valuable, if only to clarify Turkey's position on this issue. Moreover, Gerede himself climbed with information, invariably starting his conversation with the phrase: "I can't guarantee that this is so, but everything can be, and therefore I decided to inform you confidentially ...". At the same time, he treated Berezhkov to Turkish coffee ("so thick, - recalls Berezhkov, - that the spoon was almost upright in the cup"), Turkish delight and the famous Izmir liquor. The Turkish diplomat's favorite topic of conversation was talk of a possible seizure by the Germans of the oil regions of Iraq.

The Japanese ambassador in Berlin, General Hiroshi Oshima, although he was always in civilian clothes, struck Berezhkov with his military bearing and sharp gestures with his right hand when talking. It was like he was constantly slashing someone with a samurai sword. Oshima, who once served in the Kwantung Army, considered the conflicts that periodically flared up on the border between the Japanese and Soviet armies as tragic misunderstandings, making it clear that he was a supporter, if not friendly, then at least normal relations with the Soviet Union.

Berezhkov also spoke with US Charge d'Affaires Patterson. At the American embassy, he was looked at with curiosity, but without hostility. It's just that Berezhkov himself did not like to appear there very often, because all the embassy employees, from Patterson himself to the commercial attache Woods, constantly hinted to him that the Soviet Union would be Hitler's next target of attack. Such provocations, in which the echo of American newspapers was heard, infuriated Berezhkov. He had no right to discuss such things at all, especially with the Americans. His sociability and pleasant smile instantly disappeared, he fell silent like a fish, and took the opportunity to quickly leave.

Moscow demanded an almost verbatim transmission of all dialogues, sometimes even indicating intonations. Like everyone else, Berezhkov was ordered not to upload reports with his own opinion, and also to avoid Anglo-American provocations in every possible way and constantly expose them. What he was doing.

No less at ease in Berlin was the Soviet naval attache, Rear Admiral Mikhail Vorontsov. At least no less at ease than his counterpart in Moscow, Captain 1st Rank von Baumbach.

German sailors did not forget what they owed to the Soviet Union, which sheltered their most valuable transport vessels in its ports, provided a naval base on the Kola Peninsula, made it possible to use the Northern Sea Route and for the second year has been providing the German fleet with all the necessary materials.

Vorontsov introduced himself to Grand Admiral Raeder, having listened to the memories of the Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy about how in 1913 he went on a warship on a visit to St. Petersburg on the occasion of the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty. Vorontsov smiled politely in response, because he was not authorized to discuss such topics as the anniversary of the Romanovs' reign, and the topic was very slippery and unsafe for a Soviet officer.

The information received by Vorontsov clearly indicated that the entire German fleet was fighting against England in the North Sea and the Atlantic. There are plans to deploy forces in the Mediterranean, but so far nothing has actually been achieved. Too little power.

In mid-March 1941, Vorontsov received an invitation from the Chief of Staff of the German Navy, Admiral Schniewind, to come to him. Such an invitation was very unusual in the protocol of relations between naval attachés and the command of the naval forces of the host country. Vorontsov reported this to Dekanozov and to Moscow. The answer was simple: once invited, you have to go. Didn't you ask for it yourself?

After saying a few words about the fruitful cooperation between the Soviet and German fleets that had taken place over the past year and a half, Admiral Schniewind admitted that the German fleet was again in need of emergency Soviet assistance and very much hoped to receive it. It is, he explained, about the upcoming landing in England, which the Fuhrer intends to carry out in the summer.

But Germany ran into a problem. This is an acute shortage of transport ships to transport and supply the landed troops. Last year everything was calculated as expected, but during this time the British managed to destroy a number of our



transports. Can the USSR lend Germany two or three dozen dry cargo ships, which are not enough to transfer the second echelon of landing? When transporting the second echelon of the landing force, the risk will already be practically minimal, but it goes without saying that the German government will compensate the Soviet Union for all losses and compensate for all losses, including depreciation.

Will ships operate under our flags? asked the stunned Vorontsov.

- Never! Schniewind assured. - It may be necessary to leave on board some of your specialists, mainly from the personnel of the engine and boiler services, so as not to waste time on training our sailors. The names will be smeared and the tail numbers will be displayed. If any scandal breaks out, we will simply say that we bought these ships from you. But if we announce this purchase now, it will alert the British and will have the most negative consequences in many ways, which you understand, and I do not want to waste time explaining them. All this is tactically done quite simply. If Moscow agrees to help us, then just those merchant ships that constantly come to our ports will be ordered to stay there until further notice.

Admiral Vorontsov assured that he would immediately inform his leadership about the request of the command of the German fleet.

Only on March 15 came more or less good news. The first good news was that Rommel's tank transports, taking advantage of the thick fog that prevailed in the central Mediterranean at this time of the year, slipped into Tripoli.

Then came a message from Admiral Lutyens' battleships. They discovered several allied transports that had fallen behind their convoys due to the storm, and delightedly drowned them with artillery fire. The stormy sea made it impossible to do anything to save the crews of the shot ships.

Like jackals, not daring to attack a herd guarded by shepherds, but easily cracking down on domestic animals that have strayed and strayed from the herd, Lutyens' battleships, descending further south, destroyed several more transports, but were driven away by the approaching English battleship Rodney.

And before that, in the first two weeks of March, all the incoming news was disgusting, frightening and simply tragic.

On March 4, the Yugoslav regent Prince Paul secretly arrived in Berchtesgaden to see Hitler. Hitler stated bluntly: either Yugoslavia joins the Axis, or let it blame itself. The prince was pale, stuttered, twisted, twirled, but in the end he verbally promised to sign a pact in the near future and was released to Belgrade, where the royal council and the General Staff, represented by General Simovic, threw a scandal to the prince.

On the same day, a message came about another impudent sortie by the British, who had landed an airborne sabotage group near Narvik. Everything happened so suddenly that the landing did not have time to offer any resistance. Having killed the German guards of the port, the paratroopers blew up and burned down the buildings of factories for the production of the most valuable grades of technical oil, an oil refinery and the equipment of a fish terminal. Several German and Norwegian cargo ships were sunk, about 300 people were taken prisoner, and more than 400 Norwegian and Polish workers were taken to England, who were forced to work in these factories.

On March 8, the depressing news came, which they had been waiting for from day to day, hoping in their hearts that this would never happen. The upper house of the US Congress approved the Lend-Lease Act. This event was accompanied by a new, even more militant speech by Roosevelt. "All countries that fight Nazism or will fight against it will receive from the United States everything necessary for this struggle to end victoriously."

And on March 11, terrible news came that shocked both Hitler and all of Germany.

In fact, in one battle, while trying to attack another English convoy, three of the most famous underwater aces died at once: Gunter Prien, who once slapped the British with a resounding slap in the face, breaking into Scapa Flow and sinking the battleship Royal Oak; Joachim Schepke and Otto Kretschmer. True, it later turned out that Kretschmer did not die, but was taken prisoner by the British, but this did not make it any easier. All three were holders of the knight's cross, and the Fuhrer personally handed these crosses to two - Prin and Shepke.

Hitler sat in silence for a long time, his head in his hands. Tears flowed from his eyes.

The answer was devastating raids on Plymouth, Clydeside and Marseyside, in which the Luftwaffe lost 16 vehicles. New young faces in mourning frames smiled from the newspaper pages.

Among other things, a friend of the Duce, who swore that he would soon launch a counteroffensive in Albania, tried to do so on March 9 and was again defeated by the Greeks.

Finally disillusioned with the Italians, Hitler thought more and more about the Japanese. He never forgot for a moment that, by attacking the USSR, he was leaving England and the United States in his rear, which, no doubt, would crush him if he lingered in Russia. If you do the opposite - really take a chance and invade England (even on rafts), then Stalin will immediately crush him, who is just waiting for this.

Thought, subordinated to the instinct of salvation, feverishly searched for a way out.

And if his enemies could be put in two fires? If Japan opened a second front, at least against England and America, and even better - against Stalin.

Ribbentrop, in conversations with General Oshima, no longer hesitated, advised: "You must immediately capture Singapore!"

"But we are not at war with England," the Japanese general bowed politely.

From day to day, the arrival of Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka was expected in Berlin, with whom it was decided to discuss the opening of a second front against all current and potential opponents of the "new order in Europe and in the world."

By the time Matsuoka arrived, Hitler signed Directive No. 24, which was subtitled "On Interaction with Japan." The directive stated:

"1. The goal of cooperation based on the "Three Power Pact" should be to encourage Japan to open hostilities in the Far East as soon as possible.

The "Barbarossa" plan, which is being carried out in parallel, will create especially favorable political and military conditions for this.

2. In preparing for such cooperation, the most important thing is to strengthen the combat power of Japan by all means.

To accomplish this task, the commanders-in-chief of all branches of the German armed forces must quickly and fully satisfy all Japanese demands for information related to the German experience of the war, as well as issues of economic and technical assistance ...

In doing so, the following principles should be followed:

A. The general strategic goal must be presented as the rapid conquest of England in order to prevent America from entering the war ...

V. The tremendous successes achieved by Germany in the war against shipping should stimulate the use of powerful Japanese naval forces for such a task ...

d. The provisions of the "Three Power Pact" regarding strategic raw materials suggest that Japan itself must seize the territories rich in raw materials necessary for waging war ...

d.

The capture of Singapore - the key position of England in the Far East - will be a decisive success for the combined strategy of the three powers ... "

On March 17, a message came from the Soviet ambassador to Washington, Umansky, that he had been summoned to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, where he was acquainted with the documents of the Barbarossa plan obtained in Berlin by Sam Woods. The Americans were so kind that they even provided photocopies of the materials obtained by Woods.

Stalin ordered Umansky to be summoned to Moscow and, for the first time, explained to him the provocative essence of the Anglo-American policy aimed at inciting distrust and hostility between the USSR and Germany.

By this time, the Soviet military attache in Berlin, Major General Tupikov, through his agents, also obtained fragmentary materials that spoke about the same as Woods's materials.

And, finally, data from Rossler continued to come from Switzerland - additional materials and related developments for the Barbarossa plan. Although Rossler was regarded as a completely unreliable source, or rather provocative, specially created to spread English disinformation, his messages were nevertheless read carefully and taken into account.

On March 20, Stalin called a special meeting for another discussion of the accumulated information, which was directly opposite in content and direction.

The meeting was attended by Timoshenko, Zhukov, Shaposhnikov, Beria and Molotov, and the head of the GRU General Golikov and the head of the Foreign Intelligence Directorate of the newborn NKGB (former INO NKVD) General Fitin and his new chief Merkulov were called for a report.

Golikov read out a document obtained by his people and verified by Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, which said:

"Of the most probable military actions planned against the USSR, the following deserve attention:

Option No. 3 as of February 1941: "Three army groups are being created to attack the USSR: the 1st group under the command of Field Marshal Bock strikes in the direction of Petrograd; The 2nd group under the command of Field Marshal Rundstedt - in the direction of Moscow, and the 3rd group under the command of Field Marshal Leeb - in the direction of Kyiv. The beginning of the offensive against the USSR is approximately May 20.

According to General Tupikov (March 14), a German major recruited by him said the following verbatim: "We are completely changing our plan. We are heading east, to the USSR. We will take grain, coal, oil from the USSR."

The major believed that the attack on the USSR would take place somewhere between May 15 and June 15.

They also talked about Sorge's message of March 5. He allegedly saw Ribbentrop's telegram to the German ambassador in Tokyo, General Otto, where it was reported that the attack on the USSR would take place in mid-June.

At the mention of Zorga, a sad expression appeared in the eyes of the leader. Is it really impossible to stop the actions of this exposed provocateur? Do something: arrest the family, finally inform the Japanese. The leader's words were taken into account.

General Fitin, who took the floor, reported that the NKGB intelligence had a record of the conversation that took place between our plenipotentiary Comrade Dekanozov and Walter Schellenberg, head of foreign intelligence in the SS-SD system. The conversation took place at one of the receptions where Comrade Dekanozov was invited not as the plenipotentiary of the USSR, but as a veteran of the NKVD-VChK. At the reception, a relaxed, comradely atmosphere reigned, warmed up by champagne and liqueurs. Taking advantage of the moment, Dekanozov directly asked Schellenberg about the rumors that were circulating about some kind of "Barbarossa" plan, allegedly drawn up to attack the USSR. Schellenberg laughed, said a few flattering words about Soviet intelligence and admitted that such a plan really exists. Moreover, it was compiled by his service even without consulting the military. When invading England, the factor of surprise is very important. Let the British think that we have changed our plans and relax a little. We have already thrown this plan to the Americans, because we are sure that they are informing the British. Then he shook his finger at Dekanozov and remarked: we also know something about your Operation Thunder, but we don't take it seriously.

That's what "Thunder" (der Donner) said, not "Thunderstorm" (das Gewitter), although in German these concepts are often confused.

Stalin casts a menacing glance over Beria, Merkulov and Fitin: "When will this disgrace stop? Finally find out where the information is leaking from?"

Chekists cringe under the gaze of the great leader. Beria, helping everyone out, calmly says: "I already reported to you, Comrade Stalin, where the leak comes from. And you do not authorize the measures I have proposed." The leak comes from the Directorate of the Air Force, as many have already reported, including the NKVD resident in Germany, Kudryavtsev.

Stalin, with a gesture of his hand, ordered Beria to be silent and invited the comrades to return to the issue under discussion, although everyone, having heard about the preparation by the authorities of some event related to the cessation of the "leak", did not feel very comfortable, since everyone was admitted to the information about the operation "Thunderstorm". "Events" could affect any of them.

The following were analyzed:

Report of Admiral Vorontsov, Naval Attache in Berlin, about the request of the Germans

put at their disposal Soviet merchant ships for the transport of the second echelon of landing.

A new economic agreement with the USSR until the autumn of 1942, without which the Germans will simply not be able to wage war.

The presence of too small forces on the border with the USSR for an offensive.

The absence of deployed front-line headquarters in the regions bordering the USSR and the presence of such in northern France and Norway.

The leitmotif of the meeting was the certainty that even a psycho would not dare to rush with such frail forces against a multimillion-strong army oversaturated with military equipment.

And if it rushes, then it doesn't matter either. We will immediately slam him with "little blood on his territory." And "his territory" is already the whole of Europe.

Stalin also smiled. He liked the sincere optimism of the military and security officers.

The meeting was summed up by General Golikov, who read out the following summary:

"1. The intention of the Germans to carry out an invasion of the British Isles no later than the summer of this year can be considered absolutely reliable. By that time, preparations should be completed for carrying out the political and military measures outlined by the Party and the government.

2. Rumors and documents that speak of the inevitability of a war against the USSR this spring must be regarded as disinformation coming from British and ... German intelligence.

After this meeting, an encoded directive flew to all links directly or indirectly subordinate to the Soviet intelligence services:

"ALL DOCUMENTS THAT INDICATE THE NEAR START OF WAR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS FAKE ORIGINS FROM BRITISH OR EVEN GERMAN SOURCES."

On March 23, 1941, Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka arrived in Moscow. Matsuoka was on his way to Berlin and Rome, but made a stop in Moscow. The minister was given the highest honors, and straight from the station he was taken to the Kremlin, where he was received by Stalin.

No one has been honored with such a great honor for a long time.

Stalin received the Japanese minister very cordially.

"We are both Asians," he announced to the envoy of the country of the Rising Sun, "the Soviet Union is mistakenly considered a European country. Few people understand that Russia is the same Asian country as Japan." Matsuoka did not remain in debt. Being a descendant of the most powerful feudal family in Japan, he confessed to Stalin without batting an eyelid that "in spirit he is a convinced communist."

Then Matsuoka began to convince Stalin that the Japanese were fighting in China not at all with the Chinese, but with Anglo-Saxon liberalism, which posed a great danger to Japan, since all Japanese were "communists at heart" [77].

Gradually, the conversation, as it should be in the East, turned into a business channel. We talked about the possible conclusion of a non-aggression and neutrality pact and the liquidation of Japanese concessions in northern Sakhalin. They bargained for a long time, in accordance with the ancient traditions of Asian bazaars, and Stalin gestured to Matsuoka that he - a heartless creature - was simply strangling him. He showed by taking his hands around his throat.

Matsuoka promised to resolve all issues after returning from Berlin, when he, on his way home, will again call in Moscow. He expects to do this around April 8th.

Stalin asked what the Japanese thought to do with the British and Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia, which remained virtually ownerless after the collapse of distant metropolises.

The crushing of England has already been spoken of as if it had already happened. Matsuoka noted that this issue is "very complex and delicate." He knows that the Soviet Union has already negotiated with Hitler about the fate of the "bankrupt British estate" and lays claim to the Persian Gulf area. Japan has nothing against this, but it must be firmly and precisely decided what will go to Japan and what to the USSR. Here we are talking mainly about India, since Japan has no interests to the west of this region.

It has.

Knowing that most of his words would certainly be retold to Hitler, Stalin pretended to fully share the views of the Japanese minister.

Unfortunately, Matsuoka noted, he cannot but draw Mr. Stalin's attention to the completely unconstructive, provocative and simply insulting position taken by the warmongers in Washington towards Germany and Japan. Especially to Japan. They threaten us with trade sanctions, they promise to strangle our economy, freeze our assets, Matsuoka complained. Now all of Japan is outraged by another American provocation. Roosevelt ordered his fleet to remain permanently in the Hawaiian Islands in order, he said, to play the role of a revolver in the hands of a policeman and stop Japan, which had taken the path of robbery. What right does America have to declare some countries criminal, and consider itself the guardian of order?

Matsuoka admitted that such a frank preparation of America for a war against his country is of great concern to the Japanese government. But, he added, no one doubts that the Americans are capable of forging mountains of ships, aircraft and other weapons, but who will fight with these weapons? He, Matsuoka, doubts very much that the Americans are capable of this.

Stalin perked up. Approximately the same thing was told to him and his analysts. America is ready to supply weapons in any quantity in order to fight by proxy. But to fight the exhausting, modern, bloody war itself is completely incapable. Incapable - thanks to strong public opinion and democracy.

In addition, the offended Matsuoka did not let up, we also have something to surprise these Yankees if they climb to fight.

Stalin knew what the Japanese were talking about. Soviet intelligence has long been reporting on the construction in Japan of some super-powerful battleships, which had no analogue in the United States and no one in the world. The huge Japanese fleet could wait without fear for any provocation by America.

Excited, Matsuoka confessed to Stalin that he hated democracy, which corrupted the people, forcing them to obey their own whims, and not the fulfillment of the national task set by the leaders.

In diplomatic language, a complete "consensus" was reached. The next day, a big reception was given at the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs in honor of the Japanese Minister, and the next morning Matsuoka left for Berlin, very touched by the cordial reception that he received in Moscow.

On March 26, Admiral Lutyens flew to Berlin to report to Admiral Raeder. Four days ago, on March 22, having made his way through a monstrous ten-point storm, Lutyens brought the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau to Brest.

True, Brest was a poor refuge. No sooner had the ships entered the port than an English scout appeared above the base, making several circles and clearly taking aerial photographs. Everyone was anxiously expecting an air raid by the British, but fortunately the weather got worse and worse. Brest hid under a continuous cover of leaden clouds, wet snow, creeping over the harbor under gusts of icy wind.

Lutyens found the commander-in-chief in a somewhat agitated state. Raeder had recently returned from Merana, where he conferred with the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Navy, Admiral Riccardi. However, this was not a meeting, but another attempt to bring the powerful Italian fleet out of a state of paralysis. In Berlin and Rome, Raeder reported, Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka was arriving. This is the most important event, which will possibly join the Japanese military efforts to the efforts of Germany and Italy in the struggle against England. It is very important now to open a second front against England in the Far East and capture Singapore. Japan is a specific maritime power. The greatest impression on them can be made by victories at sea, which will encourage them to take action. It is simply necessary that during Matsuoka's stay in Berlin and Rome news should come, if not of a victory, then of some success of the Italian fleet in the Mediterranean.

The arguments were very convincing, and the subsequent directive of Mussolini, who also did not want to tell the Japanese guest about some defeats, prompted the Italian command to organize a raid in the Crete region on sea lanes.

English.

Lutyens reported to Raeder the results of his three-month raid, finding them unsatisfactory.

This is just the beginning, Raeder reassured. By order of the Fuhrer, the fleet headquarters prepared a draft order for a new operation of surface ships, which Admiral Lutyens would again have to lead into battle. But this time, the squadron will include the newest battleship Bismarck, which is now in Gotenhafen. Together with the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen, the battleship will break into the Atlantic through the Danish Strait, where it will connect with the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau that have left Brest. The start of the operation is scheduled for the next period of the new moon, which will be in April. Later, the second battleship of this type, the Tirpitz, will join the Lutyens squadron. The dominance of the English at sea will be ended, and the Atlantic will be completely closed to their navigation.

While the sailors were preparing for new battles under the traditional slogan "God, punish England!", Hitler, preparing to receive the Japanese minister in Berlin, prepared a small surprise. This surprise was the annexation of Yugoslavia to the Axis.

On March 25, Yugoslav Prime Minister Cvetkoviĭ and Foreign Minister Markoviĭ secretly arrived in Vienna. To do this, the ministers had to leave Belgrade in a completely different direction, get off at a suburban station and transfer to a train bound for Vienna. There, in the complete absence of the press and even their own ambassador to Germany, they signed

Protocol on the accession of Yugoslavia to the Triple Alliance.

This was the first thing that Ribbentrop happily reported to Matsuoka upon his arrival in Berlin.

In contrast to the reception given to him in Moscow, where the Japanese minister was immediately taken to see Stalin, in Berlin he had to listen to a long, confused speech by Ribbentrop at the Imperial Foreign Office before meeting with Hitler.

The main advantage of the Japanese is the ability to listen without interrupting, letting the speaker know how much they like what they hear with quick bows. What they really think at the same time, it is absolutely impossible to understand from their faces with frozen smiles.

This irritated Ribbentrop, and therefore the speech turned out to be confused, at times turning into purely rally agitation.

The imperial minister began by reminding Matsuoka and Ambassador Oshima, who was present at the conversation, about the collapse of England.

"Germany," he said, "is in the last stage of its struggle against England. During the past winter, the Fuehrer made all the necessary preparations, so that Germany is now quite ready to face England anywhere. The Fuehrer has at his disposal probably the strongest military force that has ever existed." Ribbentrop proudly declared that Germany already had 24 panzer divisions. Matsuoka bowed respectfully. He knew from his own intelligence sources that the USSR had already deployed 40 tank divisions in the western districts alone.

Therefore, the Japanese ambassador dared respectfully inquire: what are the relations between Germany and Russia today?

But this is only confidential, Ribbentrop warned, and said that "current relations with Russia are correct, although not very friendly. After Molotov's visit, when the Russians were asked to join the three-power pact, Russia set unacceptable conditions. They meant sacrificing Finland, giving Stalin bases in the Dardanelles and the opportunity to exert a strong influence on the situation in the Balkans, especially in Bulgaria.

Germany clearly sensed that ever since Sir Stafford Cripps became ambassador to Moscow, there had been a secret and even relatively obvious strengthening of the ties between Russia and England. Germany is closely following these actions."

Matsuoka asked if Germany was afraid that in such a situation, Stalin, in agreement with the British, would strike, taking advantage of some convenient circumstances, say, the departure of large German army forces to the Balkan Peninsula?

"I know Stalin personally," Ribbentrop replied, restraining himself, "and I do not consider him prone to adventure, but one cannot be completely sure."

"The German armies in the East are always in a state of readiness," Ribbentrop continued in a not entirely confident voice, but seeing how Matsuoka and Oshima looked at each other, and their smiles from ellipses suddenly turned into ovals, Ribbentrop broke loose and almost shouted:

"If ever Russia takes a position that can be interpreted as a threat to Germany, the Fuhrer will crush Russia! Germany is confident that the campaign against Russia will end with the absolute victory of German weapons and the complete defeat of the Russian army and



Russian state! The Fuhrer is convinced that in the event of hostilities, the great power of Russia will cease to exist!

Ribbentrop realized that he was saying too much. The smiles disappeared from the Japanese faces. The narrow eyes narrowed even more to hide the gleam of excitement. Matsuoka no longer doubted that a war between the USSR and Germany would become a reality in the very near future. It doesn't matter who strikes first. No wonder Stalin is ready to pay such a high price for Japanese neutrality.

Germany is on the alert and will never tolerate the slightest threat from Russia. Germany wants to conquer England as quickly as possible and not allow anything to prevent her from doing so.

It was hard to say anything about that.

"The Axis Powers," Ribbentrop concluded, "have definitely won the war already. The British would have left the war long ago if Roosevelt had not encouraged Churchill every time ... Therefore, the purpose of the three-power pact is, first of all, to intimidate America and prevent it from entering the war. The chief enemy of the new order is England, who is as much an enemy of Japan as of Germany.

Some pleading notes suddenly appeared in Ribbentrop's voice. "Therefore, the Führer, on mature reflection," he said, lowering his voice, "came to the conclusion that it would be beneficial if Japan decided to take an active part in the war against England as soon as possible. For example, a lightning attack on Singapore would be a decisive factor in the rapid defeat of England ... Japan, having captured Singapore, will acquire an absolutely dominant position in this part of East Asia. In fact, it will cut the Gordian knot."

It was too much even for the imperturbable Matsuoka. He replied that such an issue required careful study and consultation with the government. Leaving the German Foreign Office, he remarked to General Oshima: "Why should we capture Singapore if they conquer England in the summer? Singapore itself will fall into our hands?"

"Sorry, Matsuoka-san," the general replied. "I strongly doubt that it will happen the way the minister tried to convince us."

"Why?" the Minister of Foreign Affairs asked.

"Firstly, because they don't have a fleet," General Oshima explained, "and secondly, as soon as they are about to land in England, they will be crushed by a Russian boot right there, like a green caterpillar on a mat. And they understand this very well. So anything is waiting for us ahead of us, except for the landing of the Germans in England.

Matsuoka didn't answer. He thought.

On the same day, after dinner, Matsuoka was received by Hitler. He, like Ribbentrop, decided to impress the Japanese minister with a list of Germany's military victories.

"Since the beginning of the war," Hitler said excitedly, "60 Polish, 6 Norwegian, 18 Dutch, 22 Belgian and 138 French divisions have been destroyed. In addition, 12 or 13 British divisions have been expelled from the Continent. Resisting the will of the Axis powers became impossible. As Mr. Matsuoka knows, Yugoslavia also joined the Axis powers yesterday."

At that moment, glasses of mineral water were brought in for the Fuhrer and champagne for

the rest and a toast was proclaimed to the final victory over England.

Hitler smiled, and the wrinkles gathered very pleasantly around his eyes, giving the Führer's face a very hospitable and warm expression. "It would be very good," Hitler said, taking the little Japanese by the arm, "if Japan also took part in the final defeat of England. A quick takeover of Singapore would have been a splendid event. England would forever lose the opportunity to resist. What will Lord Matsuoka say to that?"

Matsuoka thanked Hitler for his frankness and replied that he generally agreed with the Führer's point of view. Unfortunately, unlike Hitler, he does not have supreme power in Japan and still has to persuade those who rule the country of the Rising Sun to his point of view. Therefore, he cannot give any specific obligations, but personally will do everything in his power.

Then Hitler asked: what did Matsuoka and Stalin talk about in Moscow?

Matsuoka did not say a word about the fact that he was going to sign a neutrality treaty with Stalin on the way back. (Hitler, too, did not say anything about the Barbarossa plan.) He only told Hitler about Stalin's concern about the fate of British possessions, especially in the Persian Gulf, and his hope that after the collapse of Britain, all differences between Japan and Russia would be eliminated.

The reception ended, but the feeling of some kind of reluctance remained on both sides.

Hitler, like any person with increased nervous excitability, had a very acute sense of impending disaster.

Even during a reception in honor of the Japanese Foreign Minister, Hitler realized that something was depressing him. Perhaps he was annoyed by the smiles, the evasive sweetly polite answers, and the idiotic bows of the Japanese. No, there was something else. He saw how his favorite adjutant Sturmbannführer Günsche appeared several times in the hall with some paper in his hand, but, seeing that the Führer was engaged in a lively conversation with the envoys of distant Japan, he did not dare to approach.

Only after seeing off the Japanese, Hitler found out what was the matter: a coup d'état had taken place in Yugoslavia.

The details were already known. On March 26, when Cvetković and Marković returned from Vienna and it became known that they had signed a pact with Hitler, General Simović started a military mutiny. There was no bloodshed. Several generals were arrested. Cvetković, who was detained by the police, was taken to Simović's headquarters, where he was forced to sign a letter of resignation. As soon as Prince Paul arrived in Belgrade, he was taken to the headquarters of General Simović, where he, along with two other regents, signed the act of renunciation. He was given several hours to pack and ordered to leave the country.

The streets of Belgrade were soon filled with cheering crowds carrying placards: "Better war than pact; Better death than slavery! English and Soviet flags appeared everywhere. Everywhere people sang the national anthem in chorus and, most interestingly, a song from the times of the last war: "Russia, come to the aid of your brothers."

To say that Hitler was furious at this news is an understatement. He had that flash of convulsive anger, which at first deprived him of the ability to think, then led to an attack of suffocation, from which only the doctor's syringe could bring him out.

Morrel. Later, Hitler himself said that "The Yugoslav putsch was like a bolt from the blue for me. When I was told about it, I thought it was a joke."

The Fuehrer immediately summoned Goering, Keitel, Jodl, Halder and Ribbentrop. By the time they arrived, he had already completely calmed down and said that it was even good that Yugoslavia showed itself that way. It would be worse if all this happened when the invasion of Greece began, and even worse if the Barbarossa plan was carried out.

Therefore, he decided, without waiting for possible declarations of loyalty from the new government, to make all preparations for

military defeat of Yugoslavia and its destruction as a national state.

Hitler's order was issued in the form of Directive No. 25. This violated all previously developed military plans. Operation Marita (the invasion of Greece) had to be almost completely replanned. Everything had to be done in a terrible hurry and impromptu.

But trouble never comes alone.

Before Hitler had time to recover a little from the Yugoslav surprise, a message arrived about a new defeat of the Italian fleet.

On March 27, in accordance with the agreement reached in Meran between Admirals Raeder and Riccardi, a powerful formation of ships of the Italian fleet went to sea.

The newest battleship "Vittorio Veneto" under the flag of Admiral Iachino led 6 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers and 14 destroyers. The battleship Vittorio Veneto was the best in the world. Sheathed in 350 mm armor, with a displacement of more than 45,000 tons, the ship carried nine 15-inch guns with a length of 54 calibers and could reach speeds of up to 30 knots. In March 1941, the excellent heavy cruisers of the Pola type surpassed all foreign ships of their class in their combat and technical characteristics,

including the Japanese ones.

Having learned from the intelligence message about the Italians entering the sea, the commander of the English fleet of the Eastern Mediterranean, Admiral Cunningham, went to intercept the enemy, leading under his flag three veterans of the Battle of Jutland - the battleships Warspite, Welliant and Burham. Although the modernization, carried out in the mid-30s, gave the Jutland veterans a modern look, the "old men" were already suffocating at a speed of 22 knots, and their guns, nominally having the same 15-inch caliber as that of the Italian battleship, were much less long-range.

At dawn on March 28, south of Cape Matapan (the southern tip of Greece), the light forces of the British entered into combat contact with the enemy. Regardless of the fact that the heavy guns of the Italians are capable of quickly destroying them all, the British immediately opened heavy fire on the enemy. Huge columns of water, raised by the shells of the Vittorio Veneto, fell on the decks and superstructures of the British cruisers, but there were no hits. At that moment, six biplane torpedo bombers from the aircraft carrier Formidable appeared in the air. Small biplanes, which looked absolutely comical against the background of the camouflaged armored monsters of the fleet of the New Roman Empire, chirping engines at their front speed of 200 km / h, rushed to attack.

The Italians failed to shoot down a single English aircraft, and the battleship Vittorio Veneto received a torpedo in the stern. The ship lost its course and control, water poured into a huge hole. Admiral Yaquino immediately ordered all ships to return to Taranto, which was 420 miles away.

The sun was rapidly setting, and the onset of darkness promised the possibility of withdrawal without further loss. Surrounding the damaged battleship, which managed to raise the speed to 19 knots, the Italian formation, without completing the task, went to the west.

An hour after sunset, it was overtaken by another six Swordfish torpedo bombers.

This time, a handsome man received a torpedo - the heavy cruiser "Pola", which, having taken several thousand tons of water, completely lost its course. The Swordfish, like nocturnal beetles, joyfully squealing their engines, rushed to their native aircraft carrier, which brazenly lit all the deck lights to take the planes on deck.

At that moment, the old veterans of Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham approached the battlefield. Having discovered the Italian detachment by radar, Cunningham's battleships rained down on the enemy the fire of their fifteen-inch guns.

The heavy cruisers Zara and Fiume instantly exploded and sank without even having time to return fire.

At this time, the heavy cruiser "Paul" fell without a course into the beam of an English searchlight. The crew, crowded on the forecastle of the wrecked cruiser, was holding out the towing lines to the British.

Admiral Cunningham's mind was unable to comprehend this. He ordered the Italians to be removed to the destroyers, and the Paula to be finished off with torpedoes, thereby missing the unique opportunity of capturing an enemy heavy cruiser at sea and driving to Alexandria, which would have become the most unique episode of the Second World War at sea. Since the time of Tsushima, when an entire Russian squadron surrendered to the Japanese, nothing like this has ever happened in the 20th century ...

It was the end. The Italian fleet no longer tried to prove its usefulness to anyone. Huge ships stood in ports until 1943, and then surrendered in a disciplined manner  
allies.

Even Hitler no longer reminded Mussolini of anything about his fleet.

The news of the military coup in Yugoslavia caused excitement in the Kremlin. The fact is that the wise policy of Comrade Stalin led to the complete political isolation of the Soviet Union. Hitler had Italy, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and, potentially, Japan, while the USSR had none, except, of course, Mongolia. However, this was of little concern.

No one particularly analyzed even such a seemingly important question: how Britain and the United States would behave after the start of Operation Thunderstorm. Some were inclined to think that England would automatically become an ally on the basis of the principle "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Others, and these were the majority, on the contrary, warned that with the beginning of the liberation campaign of the Red Army in Europe, the British, frightened, like all the bourgeoisie, of the coming general victory of the proletariat, would quickly make peace with Hitler and come out together against the USSR.

But Comrade Stalin could have been intimidated by such tales at the beginning of 1940, but not now.

He despised and hated the United States, and how they behaved was decidedly  
don't give a damn.

As for the British, they, fighting bloody battles in the south of their country, will not soon come to their senses in order to somehow react to our actions, negotiate with the Germans, or, conversely, drown them in the canal, since there will be nowhere to go. The invincible Red Army will stand on the coast of the English Channel.

Therefore, Comrade Stalin was firmly of the opinion that Hitler should not be prevented from completely clearing the continent of the British, so as not to create unnecessary problems for himself in the future.

It is just as dangerous to produce unnecessary allies as it is to produce unnecessary enemies. Some hotheads in the General Staff suggested that, in the wake of the general chaos caused by our offensive, it might be possible to cross the English Channel on the move, capturing the British Isles at the same time. But the leader of such approaches did not approve, considering such views as voluntarism, from which it is already a stone's throw to "dizziness from success." What very dangerous.

As for Yugoslavia, then, of course, in the end, whether it exists or not was not so important. However, the General Staff calculated the excellent possibility of airlifting large contingents of the Red Army to Yugoslavia. Dagger blows could quickly chop up the entire area, including Italy. Passing the capture of Switzerland promised even greater benefits. Even Lenin believed that the best place to start a world revolution is precisely Switzerland, and by no means Russia. Seven-lingual Switzerland provided such opportunities in theory, not even talking about its banks, which was breathtaking from the opening prospects.

Moscow immediately recognized the government of Simović and with speed, truly unusual, began to draw Yugoslavia into treaty relations.

The German reaction was obvious. Soviet intelligence in Hungary intercepted a message from Hitler to the Hungarian Regent, Admiral Horthy, which clearly stated: "Yugoslavia will be destroyed because it has just openly rejected the policy of understanding with the Axis Powers."

At the same time, Prime Minister Count Teleki received a telegram on the evening of April 2 from his envoy in London, which was also easily obtained by Soviet intelligence. The British Foreign Office officially warned that if Hungary took part in any German operations against Yugoslavia, she should expect a declaration of war by Great Britain.

The ball dragged on interestingly, and in Moscow it was decided to sharpen the game somewhat.

A treaty of "non-aggression and friendship" was prepared, in which the Soviet Union assumed absolutely no obligations, except for the obligation not to attack Yugoslavia itself.

On April 4, German Ambassador Count Schulenburg was acquainted with the text of the upcoming Soviet-Yugoslav treaty. Just in case. The Count read the draft treaty and expressed the cautious opinion that he "doubts that the moment chosen for the signing of such a treaty would be particularly favorable."

On April 5, the Yugoslavs in the Kremlin, where they were met by Stalin and Molotov, proposed a finished draft treaty in their own edition. It was not even a contract, but something like a friendly gesture.

Gabrilovich then spoke to Stalin one-on-one, trying to flesh out the issue of military supplies. First of all tanks and planes. Stalin generously promised.

And on the morning of April 6, it became known that German troops invaded Yugoslavia and Greece, and Belgrade was subjected to a merciless air strike, which killed 17,000 civilians.

Dead silence reigned in the Kremlin.

When, on April 6, Schulenburg appeared to Molotov with explanations that "the Yugoslav government, which came to power illegally as a result of the coup on March 27, united with England and Greece" and Germany "had accurate information that the Yugoslav general staff, together with the Greek general staff and command landed in Greece, the British expeditionary army prepared for a joint operation against Germany and Italy," Molotov just sighed. He had specially come from his dacha to receive the German ambassador, and was in a melancholy mood.

The Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR sighed again and expressed his extreme sadness that, despite all efforts, it was not possible to avoid the expansion of the war. And, apparently, never succeed until it is done with England. Molotov did not mention a single word about the Soviet-Yugoslav friendship treaty signed yesterday, and Schulenburg even more so.

Everything was clear without further ado. At the next attempt to get into European affairs, Stalin received an unequivocal slap from Hitler, but endured it, since it somehow corresponded to his global plans in one way or another.

However, on April 13, Stalin gave Hitler a reciprocal and much more painful slap in the face when a message came from Moscow about the signing of a neutrality treaty between the USSR and Japan, which the cunning Matsuoka, being in Berlin, did not even hint at.

Moreover, it was reported that when Matsuoka left home, Stalin personally appeared on the platform, which never happened at all, almost kissed the Japanese, and then hugged the German military attache Colonel Krebs and proclaimed eternal friendship between the USSR and Germany.

Anyone who knew Stalin well should have simply died of fear from such behavior.

Many were well aware of the Stalinist expression that "he hugs someone only when he cannot kill him." Collections of winged Stalinist phrases were no longer stored in one intelligence service.

His joy was understandable.

Unlike Hitler, Stalin solved the problem of war on two fronts. Now

he can bring down all his combat power on Europe, i.e. on Hitler.

The betrayal of Japan, on which he counted so much, again unsettled Hitler. He fell into a severe depression, from which neither the injection of Dr. Morrel, nor the news that General Rommel, having made a 400-mile march through the desert, inflicted the first defeat on the British could bring him out.

The parade of troops on Red Square on May 1, 1941 struck all observers with its aggressive orientation. Even the previous parade on November 7, 1940, specially conceived to impress Berlin before Molotov's visit, did not take place in such a militaristic frenzy. Perhaps the musical accompaniment of this military show was of great importance. If on November 7, Chopin's music flowed over Red Square, now military brass bands constantly played bravura marches familiar to everyone: "When Comrade Stalin sends us into battle", "If there is war tomorrow", "Following the roads we know for our beloved people's commissar". The traditional May Day appeals of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks sounded like a fighting alarm and, most interesting of all, they called for readiness for all sorts of surprises. All this was consonant with the speech of Marshal Timoshenko, who was hosting the parade of the People's Commissar of Defense of the Soviet Union, delivered by him from the podium of the mausoleum.

"This year," the First Marshal's voice amplified by loudspeakers roared, "the working people of our country and the whole world are celebrating May Day in an exceptionally difficult international situation ...

Therefore, the entire Soviet people, the Red Army and the Navy must be in a state of mobilization and combat readiness ... Comrades! Be vigilant, tirelessly master military affairs, strengthen the economic and military might of our Motherland with tenfold energy in all sectors of socialist construction! Long live the great Stalin! Hooray!" Frightened flocks of pigeons took off from the domes of St. Basil the Blessed and the turrets of the Historical Museum.

Tanks crawled across the square. Everyone paid attention to the fact that only the latest T-34 and KV tanks were presented at the parade. Tracked tractors pulled huge artillery pieces of never-before-seen systems behind them. Passed trucks with airborne paratroopers. With bayonets at the ready and in helmets, units of the NKVD passed, minting a step. Armadas of combat aircraft floated in the sky.

The troops were replaced by athletes. Many of them also walked with rifles at the ready or depicted various types of military equipment with their muscular, flexible bodies. Then came the columns of demonstrators, symbolizing the indestructible unity of the party and the people with their whole appearance. "Great Stalin - Hooray!" - rushed over the area.

"Hooray!" the demonstrators roared back.

Stalin, who stood on the podium of the mausoleum and greeted the jubilant cries with a tired uplift of his hand, could be pleased. It is unlikely that any of those walking along Red Square and enthusiastically shouting "Hurray" did not have one of their relatives arrested, shot, or deported. And yet, with what genuine joy and enthusiasm they rallied around the leader, ready to follow him wherever he leads, without asking any questions.

From time to time, Stalin stepped behind the members of the Politburo standing on the podium and thoughtfully measured the podium with unhurried steps back and forth. He thought. And there was something.

All recent events indicated that the plan for the further development of hostilities on the European and African continents, delivered by Soviet intelligence officers, was correct.

As expected, Yugoslavia and Greece could not withstand the impact of the powerful forces of the Wehrmacht. There was some hope that the British in the area of Mount Olympus would stop the German advance. But that did not happen. Unexpectedly for everyone, the British began the evacuation of their almost fifty thousandth expeditionary force. They evacuated to Crete, taking with them almost all the ships of the Greek merchant fleet - the fifth in the world.

The German offensive in Greece and Yugoslavia coincided with their offensive in North Africa, where General Rommel had actually driven the British back to the Egyptian border, and General O'Connor, the winner of the Italians, was captured by the Germans.

On the coast of France, German troops, according to intelligence reports, are continuing intensive amphibious landing exercises. The Germans intend to use large forces of airborne troops in the invasion of England, having previously tested their combat capabilities when capturing some large island. Scouts agree that it will be the island of Crete.

The British are clearly alarmed. Throughout April, the British Ambassador Stafford Cripps tried to get a reception from Stalin with some new provocative reports about Germany's plans to attack the USSR. Stalin did not accept him and ordered Molotov not to receive the British ambassador Cripps and the American ambassador Steinhardt either. Let Vyshinsky deal with them.

The main thing is that the Germans, with their usual pedantry, are fulfilling their schedule of operations, which we are well aware of, thanks to the excellent work of our intelligence. This means that soon the Germans will launch a major offensive against the British at sea. In Gdansk, their new battleships have already been put into operation. They follow their schedule and we follow ours.

The conclusion of a neutrality treaty with Japan made it possible to transfer several powerful tank and combined arms formations from the Far East.

The final development of the mobilization plan, which has the name MP-41, and the polishing of Operation Thunderstorm are nearing completion.

Stalin ordered that all work be completed no later than May 15. The measures taken in industry since the 18th Party Conference have yielded very positive results. Tank factories produced more than 300 vehicles per month. Neither aviation, nor artillery factories, nor factories for the production of ammunition were lagging behind. Complete order was restored in transport, and the railroad workers were transferred to martial law and actually poured into the railway troops of the Red Army.

The organs of the NKVD also achieved great success in ensuring the security of the country.

On April 20, according to the testimony of former General Proskurov, the head of the Air Force Directorate, Lieutenant General Rychagov, was arrested.

Stalin has long been suspicious of the too high accident rate in aviation units, which looks very much like sabotage and deliberate sabotage. He repeatedly raised these questions with Rychagov. At first, he tried to somehow explain this by too intensive flight training programs, poor airfield equipment, and improper staffing of flight personnel. And lately he's just started to get rude. On the last reproach of Stalin about too many emergency situations in aviation, he almost yelled: "You are forcing us to fly on coffins. That's a big accident!" Stalin was even taken aback. Why "on the coffins"? We have excellent aircraft MIGs, Yaks, LAGGs. "Don't talk like that," he said softly to Rychagov. "You shouldn't talk like that."

But even Stalin himself did not expect what was discovered after Rychagov's arrest, when they searched his office safes at the Directorate, at the Air Force Academy, at the Aviation Control Command of the Moscow Region, at the central air defense control panel and, of course, at the apartment and dacha.

Enough evidence was collected to charge the former air force commander with treason. True, the evidence itself did not say anything, but with the help of the testimony of Rychagov himself, they became completely



obvious.

Rychagov quickly confessed everything. He recently married the famous pilot Maria Nesterenko, whom he loved very much. Therefore, when asked by investigator Matevosov how much his wife was aware of his criminal activities and whether he wanted a confrontation with her, in which there was a clear threat of arrest and Maria Nesterenko, Rychagov broke down.

He admitted that in a criminal conspiracy with the former General Proskurov, as well as with other generals, mainly aviation, he was preparing a coup d'etat with the aim of killing comrades Stalin, Molotov, Zhdanov and Shcherbakov and restoring the power of landlords and capitalists in the USSR.

In addition, he prepared the defeat of the Red Army aviation in a future war, cultivating rumors among the personnel about the unreliability of Soviet aviation equipment ("coffins"), organizing constant flight accidents, damage to material, etc.

Of course, he was asked to name accomplices.

Rychagov was stubborn, but the investigators Rhodes, Shvartsman, Matevosov and Semyonov, assigned to a special team to conduct this most important inquiry of special national importance, were great masters of their craft.

Almost simultaneously with Rychagov, his main accomplices in the criminal group (conspiracy) were also arrested: the head of the Air Force Academy, Lieutenant General Fyodor Arzhenukhin, Lieutenant General Pyotr Pumpur, Air Force Commander of the Moscow Military District, General Ivan Sacrier, Head of the Armaments Directorate of the Air Force Main Directorate and the most prominent designer of aircraft guns, Yakov Taubin.

The investigation quickly established that, although the "armed men" acted in collusion with Rychagov's group, they also created their own sabotage and wrecking network, which, in addition to Sacrier, was headed by General Georgy Savchenko, deputy head of the main artillery department of the NPO of the USSR, and General Stepan, head of the department of this department. Sklizkov. Both were immediately arrested. Then, exposed by the testimony, the following were captured: the chief of staff of the Air Force Directorate, Major General Volodin, the commander of the Air Force of the Far Eastern Front, Major General Gusev, and Major General of the Technical Troops Kayukov, the head of one of the directorates of the NPO.

Interrogations, arrests and searches continued. Replacing each other, the investigators worked around the clock. Stalin even felt better at heart. Just think how the Thunderstorm could end, if it started with so many traitors in the Air Force? It is good that at least at the last moment this nest of traitors was covered.

The German ambassador to Moscow, Count Friedrich Werner von Schulenburg, returned from vacation on 30 April. He brought to Berlin a memorandum drawn up jointly with the military attaché, General Koestring. The memorandum stated that since the USSR was in complete political isolation, the expansion of economic relations with it would inevitably lead first to a closer political and then to a military alliance, which was very beneficial for Germany.

On April 28, Hitler summoned Schulenburg to his office.

On the Führer's desk lay a memorandum written by Schulenburg and Koestring.

"What are you writing me here, Count," Hitler asked, "how can I follow your

recommendations if Stalin had already decided to attack me?

Schulenburg was stunned by this beginning of the conversation.

However, having coped with the excitement, the count firmly told Hitler that he did not believe in the possibility of a Russian attack on Germany. On the contrary, everyone in Moscow is alarmed by rumors of an impending German attack on the USSR.

- You do not believe that Stalin can attack us? Hitler asked Schulenburg. "You don't believe me, Count, but I do. I have more information on this subject than you, although it would seem that it should be the other way around.

The Fuhrer led the dumbfounded ambassador to a map showing the famous Belostok and Lvov balconies, and moving his finger over the blue symbols depicting Soviet tank, infantry and cavalry divisions, artillery regiments and airfields, he asked Schulenburg if such a concentration of troops could be qualified otherwise than the strategic concentration on the eve of the invasion?

"Reich Chancellor," Schulenburg tried to object, "I am sure that you are exaggerating the danger. In any case, the war with Russia, whoever starts it, will be a tragedy for both of our countries. While further economic and political cooperation, as I indicated in the memorandum reported to you, will bring incalculable benefits to our country.

- What are you trying to persuade me, Count? Hitler chuckled. "I am not going to attack the USSR. And if I do this, then only if I have no other choice. And so, in principle, I completely agree with you and am ready to help in every possible way to improve relations between us and the Kremlin ...

The illogicality of all the actions of Hitler led Count Schulenburg to despair. He left Berlin the next day, fully convinced that it was his duty to prevent at any cost a future war between Germany and Russia and to create that German-Russian alliance that Bismarck had dreamed of.

Count Schulenburg decided to start his own secret negotiations with the Russians in order to prevent the two Great Powers from "sliding into war".

The Count hesitated, as what he was up to without the sanction of his government bordered on high treason. The only person in the embassy whom Schulenburg could trust was his adviser Gustav Hilger, known to the count for his sharp anti-Nazi views.

It was Hilger who advised Schulenburg to get in touch with one of the Soviet diplomats of about the same rank as he, and talk with him in an informal setting about the possible dangerous development of German-Russian relations.

Hilger knew that Schulenburg's colleague, the Soviet ambassador to Berlin, Vladimir Dekanozov, was currently in Moscow, and advised him to talk to him. In addition to the position of ambassador to Germany, Dekanozov was also Molotov's deputy people's commissar for foreign affairs, and was even close to Stalin himself. At least he will report everything to everyone as it should be.

On May 5, Dekanozov was invited to breakfast in Astafyevo, near Moscow, where the residence of the German ambassador was located in a luxurious mansion, in which, in addition to the beautiful

antique furniture, collected a precious collection of paintings and ancient weapons. In the USSR, all this cost a penny.

From the German side, only Schulenburg himself and, of course, Hilger, who knew Russian very well, were present at the breakfast.

To begin with, Count von Schulenburg said that from childhood he was brought up in the spirit of the unforgettable Bismarck, who always wanted good relations with Russia and warned against any conflicts with her. All the more regrettable for him, continued the German ambassador, that relations between our countries have deteriorated so much that rumors about a possible war between Russia and Germany are already openly circulating. Therefore, realizing the seriousness of the situation, he wants to state the following ...

Here Dekanozov interrupted Schulenburg's speech and inquired on behalf of whom the ambassador was going to make a statement? Is he speaking on behalf of his government? Does he have the authority to do so? Otherwise, he will not be able to convey anything to the Soviet leadership.

Schulenburg and Hilger informed Dekanozov that they took this "unprecedented step in the history of diplomacy" on their own initiative and without the knowledge of their leadership.

Before events begin to develop according to the worst-case scenario, moreover, to develop automatically, bilateral diplomatic activity should be shown and one more step towards each other should be taken, as was the case in August-September 1939.

Schulenburg then told the audience in detail about his audience with Hitler on 28 April. In particular, the Fuhrer was very concerned about what he thought was too large a concentration of Soviet troops on the border. He, Schulenburg, tried to dissuade the Fuhrer, but I'm not sure that he succeeded completely 100 percent. He also touched upon the rumors about the upcoming war between Germany and the USSR, which have been circulating intensively in Berlin and throughout Germany since January 1941, which makes it difficult to work in Moscow. Hitler assured him that he was not going to attack Russia, as he had completely different plans. Simply, due to the mentioned actions of the Soviet government, he was forced to take some precautions on the eastern border.

Then Hilger intervened, saying that it would be nice if the government of the USSR took some steps to counterbalance their latest statements. And then come up with new initiatives in the spirit of resuming the negotiations that were interrupted in November last year...

To this Dekanozov replied that the Soviet Union had already exhausted all its initiatives.

Any new initiative for rapprochement with Germany would inevitably involve the USSR in the Alliance of three powers and in the war on the side of Germany.

This was well understood not only in Moscow, but also in Berlin.

Schulenburg suggested discussing this issue in more detail "at a repeated similar meeting of the two ambassadors." Dekanozov was gloomy, took a sip of wine and did not even touch his plate.

While the Soviet and German ambassadors were having a "secret" meeting at Schulenburg's residence, Comrade Stalin was speaking at a reception given in honor of graduates of the military academies at the Grand Kremlin Palace. Marshals, generals and admirals, officers of all ranks,

holding their breath, listened to the speech.

Congratulating the graduates on their graduation, Stalin spoke about the changes that had taken place in the army during the years that the graduates had spent within the walls of the military academies. "You will return to the army," the leader pointed out, "and you will not recognize it. The Red Army is far from what it was a few years ago.

Further, the leader admitted that 300 divisions, 20 thousand tanks and "many thousands of aircraft" are currently deployed in the Red Army. "The Red Army," the leader emphasized once again, "is a modern army, and a modern army is an offensive army."

"You will arrive in units from the capital," Stalin addressed the audience. - Will the Red Army soldiers and commanders ask you questions about what is happening now? It is necessary for the commander not only to command, this is not enough. You have to be able to talk to the soldiers. Our great commanders have always been closely associated with the soldiers. We must act like Suvorov."

The mention of a tsarist general as an example was completely new. Almost everyone in the audience noticed this original ideological turn. Soon, new posters will come from the combat training department of the Red Army, where it will be inscribed: "Grandchildren of Suvorov, children of Chapaev! We fight great, prick desperately!

And, indeed, who else to cite as an example? Not Tukhachevsky? And who, besides Suvorov, so famously attacked neighboring countries and even Italy and Switzerland?

Stalin paused, took a sip of water from a glass, narrowed his eyes, looked around the hushed hall and continued: "In order to prepare well for war, it is not only necessary to have a modern army, but it is necessary to prepare the war politically.

What does it mean to prepare for war politically? To prepare war politically means that every person in the country understands that war is necessary. The peoples of Europe look with hope to the Red Army as a liberating army. Apparently, war with Germany cannot be avoided in the near future, and perhaps the initiative in this matter will come from us. I think it will happen in August. And that's why.

Germany began the war and went into the first period under the slogan of liberation from the yoke of the Treaty of Versailles. This slogan was popular, met with the support and sympathy of all those offended by Versailles. Now the situation has changed. Now the German army is marching with other slogans. She changed the slogans of liberation from Versailles to predatory ones.

Then Stalin moves on to the most important issue - to expose the myth of the invincibility of the German army.

"Is the German army really invincible?" - the great leader asks from the rostrum and answers: "No. There are no and never were invincible armies in the world. There are better, good and weak armies."

From the point of view of the military, there is nothing special in the German army in tanks, and in artillery, and in aviation. (Stalin knows better than others that the Red Army has five times more military equipment than the Wehrmacht, and there is nothing to compare the quality at all.)

Military thought is not advancing, military technology is not only lagging behind ours, but Germany in terms of aviation is beginning to overtake England and America.

This is also something new. For the first time in such a positive context, the main strongholds of imperialism, England and America, are mentioned. It turns out that they even have aviation no worse than German.

In conclusion, with noticeable difficulty getting out of the piling of repetitions, Stalin said: "Any politician, any figure who admits a feeling of complacency, may find himself in front of a surprise, as France was in front of a catastrophe."

The hint was more than transparent. In the very near future, Germany will face the same catastrophe that befell France last summer.

Congratulating once again all those present on the completion of the course of study and wishing them success, Stalin ended his speech, waiting with a weary look for another stormy ovation from the audience.

On May 6, Soviet newspapers published the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR appointing Stalin Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. Molotov became his deputy, retaining the post of People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs.

Under the heading "We must be prepared for any surprises," the newspapers also noted Stalin's speech yesterday at a reception for graduates of military academies. "In his speech," the newspapers reported, "Comrade Stalin noted the enormous changes that have taken place in the Red Army over the past few years. Stalin spoke for forty minutes and was listened to exclusive attention."

All the intelligence agencies of the world wriggled like snakes to find out what exactly the leader was saying to the military for forty minutes.

A rather cleverly crafted misinformation was planted on the scouts: among those who listened to Stalin's speech, the impression was that the leader was trying to "prepare the army and the country for some kind of new compromise with Germany." He is ready to make new concessions to Hitler for the sake of maintaining peace.

On May 8 and 9, reports came of heavy German air raids on London, when bombs landed on Britain's holy of holies, the House of Commons. Newspapers published a photograph of Winston Churchill standing among the ruins of the Parliamentary Assembly Hall.

However, on May 10, an event occurred, before the sensationalism of which all other news.

On the evening of May 10, 1941, Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess arrived at the Messerschmitt test airfield in Augsburg. Starting in the autumn of 1940, Hess expressed a desire to personally test new models of German fighters. The general aircraft designer wanted to protest, referring to Hitler's order issued at the beginning of the war, forbidding the leaders of the Nazi Party to fly aircraft in wartime.

But there was another Hitler's decree, also well known to Messerschmitt, which read: "Deputy Fuhrer Hess receives full authority to make decisions on behalf of the Fuhrer by the Führer Decree." No one could refuse the demands of such a person, including Willy Messerschmitt.

Hess chose to fly a new long-range fighter Me-110. In no way inferior to professional test pilots in the skill of controlling a fighter, Hess made dozens of takeoffs and landings from the airfield in Augsburg, each time reporting to Messerschmitt and his engineers on the test results, pointing out various shortcomings of the new machine. Hess was especially worried about the insufficient, in his opinion, the range of the new machine. He suggested that Messerschmitt install on a fighter

additional fuel tanks, which could then be dropped during the flight.

Rudolf Hess arrived at the airfield to check how some of the latest changes made to the fighter project by the designers on his recommendation would behave in flight. It was about creating a more advanced model of a night fighter based on the Me-110. Closing the lantern and starting the engine, Hitler's deputy famously took off from the ground, using only a third of the strip, and disappeared into the approaching twilight. Hess did not return to the airfield.

On May 10, at 22:08, an English air defense post on the north coast near Northumberland noticed a German fighter flying alone. It was strange, because enemy planes had never flown so far to the north.

At 23:07, a new message came from the air defense post, which noticed the lone Messerschmitt. A few minutes ago, the report said, the spotted plane crashed and burned near the village of Eaglesham in Scotland, and the pilot jumped out with a parachute and was detained by civil defense fighters.

The pilot who ejected by parachute was first met by farmer David McLean. The farmer was already going to bed when a huge explosion that thundered in his field made McLean jump out of the house. On the field, he saw the dying remains of a fallen aircraft, and in the sky - the dome of a descending parachute. McLean had no idea whose plane it was. The pilot, having extinguished his parachute, removed his helmet and goggles, addressed the farmer in impeccable English. "I'm looking for Lord Hamilton's castle. If I'm not mistaken, this is his estate?" The farmer replied that this was so, but the lord's castle was still far away and asked the pilot what had happened and who he was. He introduced himself as Adolf Horn and said that he "brought very important news for the Royal Air Force" and asked him to quickly take him to Lord Hamilton's castle.

Finding out that the stranger was German, McLean called the local civil self-defense fighters, and they took the prisoner to the nearest village of Bubsy, where their headquarters was located. Having locked the pilot in one of the premises of the headquarters and reported this to the authorities, the MPVO fighters considered their duty fulfilled at least until the morning, when the authorities promised to send a car for the prisoner. But the prisoner suddenly raged, shouting that he was a German officer who had arrived in England on a special mission, and he needed to immediately meet with Lord Hamilton. All advice to rest until the morning, and "we'll figure it out there," the captured pilot ignored, continuing to loudly repeat his demands. The self-defense headquarters again reported to the authorities that the detained German officer Adolf Horn, who claims that he had arrived on a special mission, jumping out of a fighter by parachute for this, wants to immediately speak with Lord Hamilton.

The Duke of Hamilton, the most distinguished nobleman of Great Britain, a peer of the empire, who has free access to King George and Prime Minister Churchill, whose family castle was nearby, was extremely surprised that some captured German pilot wanted to tell him something important. For him, and no one else.

Nevertheless, on the morning of May 11, the duke, accompanied by an investigator, arrived at the Maryhill barracks, where the captured pilot was transported. First of all, the things found with the pilot were examined: a Leica camera, some pills, several photographs, apparently family ones, and business cards in the name of Dr. Karl Haushofer and his son, Dr. Albrecht Haushofer.

Then, accompanied by an officer on duty and an investigator, the duke entered the room in which the prisoner was placed.

Seeing the duke, the prisoner said that he wanted to talk to him face to face. Hamilton

asked the officers accompanying him to leave.

Then the German pilot reminded the lord that they had already met at aviation competitions in 1934 and at the Berlin Olympics in 1936. "I don't know if you remember me," he said, "I am Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess..."

Sunday fell on May 11, 1941, and on Sundays - war is not war - Churchill liked to relax. "Otherwise," he said, "it would be impossible to work around the clock all week." Being in the country castle of his friend in Ditchley, Churchill enjoyed watching a comedy film with the participation of the famous comedians of the Max brothers. At that moment, the secretary approached the Prime Minister of Great Britain and reported that the Duke of Hamilton urgently asked him to answer the phone.

Churchill was surprised. He knew that his friend was in Scotland. What could happen there that couldn't wait until tomorrow morning? The prime minister asks the secretary to tell Hamilton to call in the morning. However, the secretary returns and repeats that the duke insists on talking, emphasizing its extraordinary importance and urgency.

"Winston, you won't believe it," Hamilton shouted into the phone, "Hess has arrived in Scotland." Churchill knew only one Hess - Hitler's deputy, Reich Minister, member of the Supreme Defense Council of the German Empire, member of the Privy Council of the Nazi Party, where he was considered the first person after Hitler. Churchill thought it was fantasy.

Realizing what was happening, he immediately dictated to his secretary the measures to be taken in connection with this sensational event:

- "1. Order that Mr. Hess be handed over as a prisoner of war not to the Ministry of the Interior, but to the Ministry of War.
2. For the time being, place him near London in a conveniently located house, in complete isolation. In the future, everything must be done so that he sets out his views and ideas, while trying to get as much valuable information from him as possible.
3. It is necessary to look after his health and provide him with comfort, food, books, writing materials and the opportunity for rest. It must not have any connection with the outside world or receive visitors, except by persons on the instructions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

Apparently Hess was counting on a completely different reception. But no matter what he counted on, he probably did not imagine that, starting from May 10, 1941, he would have to spend 46 years in prison - until his death, which followed on August 17, 1987 in Spandau prison.

The night before, Hitler's favorite and his personal architect Albert Speer, together with the Fuhrer, worked on a project to rebuild Berlin into the capital of the world. The huge boulevard in the center of the city, lined with statues of generals, had to rest against a giant triumphal arch, under which a whole link of bombers could fly. Hitler made several comments on the project and asked Speer to come to him on the morning of May 11 with a finalized project, which was supposed to be implemented no later than. 1950.

Early in the morning with a roll of drawings, Speer arrived in Bergkhov. In Hitler's waiting room, he found Hess's pale and excited adjutants Leitgen and Pitsch. They asked the architect to let them through first to the Führer, as they should give him an important letter from Hess.

Speer, of course, agreed and, while one of the adjutants went into Hitler's office, Speer, unfolding his sketches on the table, began to check how much he managed to take into account all the Fuhrer's remarks.

A terrible, almost animal roar made Speer flinch. Sketches of triumphal arches fell to the floor. Then he heard Hitler shout: "Where is Bormann? Come to me immediately!"

Everyone waiting in the waiting room was forced to move to a room on the top floor and locked up there.

Fifteen minutes later, the leaders of the security service arrived in Bergkхов in full force, led by Himmler himself: Heydrich, Schellenberg and Muller.

The consequences were terrible. All Hess employees, from drivers to personal adjutants, were arrested. Having learned that Hess had consulted with astrologers before the flight and, allegedly, they advised him to fly to England, Hitler ordered mass arrests of astrologers, soothsayers, fortune tellers and psychics and strictly forbid them to continue doing anything like that in Germany.

Hess's wife was declared an accomplice, deprived of all the privileges arising from the high position of her husband, including state support. She was not entitled to any pensions, and only thanks to the participation of Eva Braun, who secretly supplied her friend with money behind Hitler's back, she managed to somehow make ends meet.

Meanwhile, SS Brigadeführer Walter Schellenberg, the head of the SD, was reporting to Hitler what information the British could potentially squeeze out of Hess. First of all, the SS chief of foreign intelligence expressed his confidence that, because of his loyalty to Hitler and the cause of National Socialism, Hess would never betray our strategic plans to the enemy. "Although," Schellenberg added, seeing the doubt on the Fuhrer's face, "this is quite acceptable, given his current position."

"As for the upcoming campaign in Russia," continued the head of the SD, "it would be prudent to consider this incident with Hess as a possible warning to the Russians, although it is doubtful that the British, having learned anything from Hess's interrogations, will immediately notify the Russians about this. Apparently, the main goal of Hess was not a betrayal of our goals and plans, but an obsession with reconciling England and Germany.

Heydrich, who then spoke, added that, although he generally agreed with Schellenberg's opinion, he considered it necessary to investigate the role of the British secret service in this matter. In any case, the analysis of the information that Hess possessed says the following:

First, he knew about the plan of the war against Russia, he was her opponent. Being up to his neck in party work and ideology, he did not delve into the details of military plans, did not know any exact dates and the like, which could be of strategic interest to the enemy.

Secondly, being a naive and gullible man, Hess continued to be confident that Operation Sea Lion would be carried out this summer, which caused him additional suffering and, perhaps, with the aim of convincing the British not to go ahead with an invasion of their islands, but to agree to a peace agreement with Germany, he took his more than strange step.

And, thirdly, with regard to the possibility of the British transferring information received from Hess to Moscow, it must be borne in mind that the Russians have long considered all information coming from London as disinformation, simply not even wanting to listen



anything from the British.

Thus, concluded Heydrich, none of our plans and plans are threatened with serious complications due to the flight of Hess. The main difficulty is seen only in explaining this incident to the allies. Especially Japan, which may decide that we have decided to negotiate with England behind its back. It is equally important to somehow explain this act to Stalin, who, if he is suspicious, may decide that we are abandoning the planned actions against the British metropolis, and will accordingly change our own plans, which is very dangerous, especially now, when preparations for the plan " Barbarossa has entered a decisive phase.

And, finally, Heydrich sighed, everything that happened must somehow be explained to the German people, with whom Hess communicated much more than all other leaders of the country. Even bigger and tighter than Dr. Goebbels. Unfortunately, we cannot avoid an official statement on this matter.

The official statement was drawn up fairly quickly. It said: "A member of our party, Hess, who, due to a progressive illness that had been going on for many years, the Führer most strictly forbade flying, recently tried - despite the existing prohibition - to take control of the plane again. On May 10, he took off from Augsburg, but has not returned from this flight to this day.

Under such circumstances, the National Socialist movement must, unfortunately, reckon with the fact that a member of our party, Rudolf Hess, got into a plane crash and could die or fall into the hands of the enemy.

After listening to an official statement, Hitler said that henceforth a special clause would be inserted into the conditions of peace with the British on the extradition of Hess, whom he intended to publicly hang as a traitor.

On May 12, Stalin ordered the embassies of Belgium, Norway, Greece, and Yugoslavia to be closed in Moscow, and their personnel either to leave the country within 48 hours, or to switch to the position of internees. It was a legal recognition of the occupation of these countries by Hitler.

The day before, at a secret meeting of the Politburo, i.e. in the presence of Stalin, Molotov, Beria and Merkulov, who was not a member of the Politburo, the report of the Soviet ambassador in Berlin, Vladimir Dekanozov, was heard.

Summarizing his numerous conversations with Goering, Hess, Schellenberg, Ribbentrop, Weizsäcker and other German leaders, Dekanozov reported that the German leadership almost officially warned him about the measures to mislead the British in 1941. During these events, rumors of a possible German attack on the Soviet Union would be spread, since large contingents of Wehrmacht forces were withdrawn to the east, beyond the range of British aviation, for rest and reformation.

The Soviet government must also understand that the British, for their part, will make every effort to set the USSR and Germany against each other, as evidenced by the campaign that has already begun in the British and American press about the intention of the Soviet Union to launch a surprise attack on Germany.

To this, Stalin thoughtfully said: "Yes, they scare us with the Germans, and they scare the Germans with us."

Further, Dekanozov repeated the report already made to Stalin about his conversation with

Schulenburg and Helger.

Dekanozov's report did not make a particularly strong impression on Stalin, but on the other hand, the message that came on the same day through several intelligence channels about the arrival of Rudolf Hess in England stunned the leader of all peoples no less than Hitler.

Hess was sent to England, of course, by Hitler. Otherwise, it is simply impossible to imagine. What would the world think if Comrade Molotov, having stolen, say, a MIG-3 fighter, flew to Germany and parachuted over Hitler's headquarters? What would he think?

That Comrade Molotov is fulfilling the task of the Central Committee, i.e. comrade Stalin. It doesn't happen otherwise. This means that Hitler again decided to offer peace to England and, as a sign of the sincerity of his intentions, sent no one to Churchill, but his first deputy. And not just a deputy, but a deputy in the party. So he's giving up on his plans to invade England this summer? What does he want? He learned about our plans and wants to meet us with all available forces, transferring all his divisions from the canal to the east? There is something to go crazy! Immediately find out with what proposals Hess flew to England. Who sent him? What is the British reaction?

The leader was genuinely outraged. Beria, Fitin and Golikov saw in the eyes and intonations of the leader that they needed to hurry. Intersecting with each other, ciphers flew into the air. The phone on the desk of Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to London, was constantly ringing.

All Soviet agents in Germany, in the occupied territories and in neutral countries, began to move.

The official German message, which arrived in time by this time, of course, caused only wry smirks.

Finally, on May 14, the first cipher came from London, registered in the log of incoming cipher telegrams of the NKGB under No. 376.

"OWL. SECRET

Vadim reports from London that:

1. According to Senchen, Hess, upon arriving in England, stated that he intended first of all to turn to Hamilton, an acquaintance of Hess from joint participation in the 1934 air competitions. Hamilton belongs to the so-called Cleveland clique. Hess made his landing near the estate of Hamilton.

2. Hess told Kirkpatrick that he had brought peace proposals with him. The essence of the peace proposals is still unknown to us. (Kirkpatrick is a former Counselor at the British Embassy in Berlin.)

14/V-1941 No. 376.

"Vadim" was Ivan Chichaev, a resident in London, "Zakoopkom" was conventionally designated the Foreign Office, the British Foreign Office, and "Senchen" was the famous Kim Philby, a double agent extradited to the British back in 1940 by Walter Krivitsky and who has since supplied Soviet intelligence so much misinformation that could

lead to disaster not just one country, but an entire continent. All conversations with Hess, which the British considered interrogations, and Hess himself and Comrade Stalin - negotiations, were recorded on tape by the British intelligence service, in which Philby served, who transferred all these films to Moscow after some editing.

From further messages, Stalin understood the following: Hess never once mentioned the possibility of a German attack on the Soviet Union, and answered the direct questions of the British about such a possibility in the negative.

Hess frankly warned the British that a German landing was imminent and England would be destroyed this year if the British did not agree to peace.

There was no agreement from the British.

In any case, such messages were sent by Philby, from which Stalin concluded:

1. The invasion of England will definitely take place.
2. Germany has no plans to attack the USSR.

He could be sure of this, since all conversations with Hess were held in an atmosphere of top secrecy and were by no means intended for him, Stalin, disinformation.

It was quite logical, if not for one circumstance.

The British knew that Philby was working for Moscow and, handing over the tapes to him, they perfectly understood that Stalin would believe in their authenticity. That is why they built conversations with Hess in the appropriate way.

Why?

Yes, very simply: in Berlin, and in London, and in Washington, they did not want Stalin to start the next game of the global struggle for world domination first. By common forces, conditions have already been created when the leader of the USSR does not believe in genuine information, considering it disinformation, and considers disinformation to be information. This is the highest art of intelligence.

On May 15, 1941, at 7:30 am Moscow time, a three-engine German transport aircraft Yu-52 appeared from the German border over Bialystok.

Recently, German planes have repeatedly violated the airspace of the USSR, conducting daily visual reconnaissance and aerial photography of areas where Soviet troops are concentrated. Such flights irritated the Soviet command, which was forced to operate at night and spend a lot of time masking all its activities for the deployment of troops in the daytime, that Molotov was forced to send a rather sharp note of protest to the Germans on April 22.

The new intruder aircraft appeared early in the morning over Bialystok, continued flying deep into Soviet territory, heading for Minsk. Thousands of eyes followed its flight from the ground, but no attempt was made to interrupt that defiant flight.

After flying over Minsk, Yu-52 continued flying further east, heading towards Smolensk. The weather was beautiful, the sun shone brightly in the blue sky. Ground air defense stations, instead of declaring an alarm and starting to direct interceptors at the intruder, contacting the Junkers, corrected its course and flight altitude.

Having passed Smolensk, the Junkers headed for Moscow and at about half past twelve in the morning entered the air defense zone of the capital of the USSR. Perfectly navigating the complex infrastructure of the outskirts of the giant city, the plane confidently landed on the runway of the Tushino airfield known throughout the country.

Turning at the end of the runway, the Junkers shut down its engines just as a sleek black Ford pulled up beside it, its nickel-plated headlights and bumpers gleaming in the sun.

A man got out of the car, dressed despite the heat in a double-breasted suit and a hat, climbed into the plane along the extended elegant metal ladder. Soon he reappeared, carrying a small leather briefcase. The Ford immediately left the airfield and, accompanied by a black Emka, rushed towards Moscow. Two hours later, having refueled, the Junkers took off from the Tushino airfield and, having gone all the way in the opposite direction, disappeared into German airspace.

"Dear Mr. Stalin,

I am writing this letter to you at the moment when I finally came to the conclusion that it is impossible to achieve a lasting peace in Europe, either for us or for future generations, without the final crushing of England and the destruction of her as a state ...

However, the closer the hour of the final battle approaches, the more problems I face. Any war is unpopular among the masses of the German people, and especially the war against England, because the German people consider the English to be a brotherly people, and the war between us is a tragic event. I will not hide the fact that I think the same way and have repeatedly offered peace to England on very humane terms, given the current military situation of the British. However, the insulting responses to my peace proposals and the constant expansion of the geography of hostilities by the British with the obvious desire to draw the whole world into this war convinced me that there was no other way out than to invade the (English) Isles and finally crush this country.

However, British intelligence began to deftly use the position of "brother peoples" for their own purposes, applying this thesis not without success in their propaganda.

Therefore, opposition to my decision to invade the islands embraced many sections of German society, including individual representatives of the highest levels of state and military leadership. You probably already know that one of my deputies, Mr. Hess, I believe in a fit of insanity due to overwork, flew to London in order, as far as I know, to once again encourage the British to common sense, if only by their incredible deed. Judging from the information at my disposal, some of the generals of my army, especially those who have noble relatives in England, descended from the same ancient noble roots, have also embraced similar sentiments.

In this regard, the following circumstance is of particular concern to me.

During the formation of the invasion forces away from the eyes and aircraft of the enemy, as well as in connection with recent operations in the Balkans, a large number of my troops, about 80 divisions, have accumulated along the border with the Soviet Union, which may have given rise to the rumors circulating now about a possible military conflict between us. .

I assure you on the honor of the head of state that this is not the case.

For my part, I also understand that you cannot completely ignore these rumors and have also concentrated a sufficient number of your troops on the border.

In such a situation, I do not at all exclude the possibility of an accidental outbreak of an armed conflict, which, under conditions of such a concentration of troops, can take on very large proportions, when it will be difficult or simply impossible to determine what was its root cause. It will be no less difficult to stop this conflict.

I want to be very frank with you.

I fear that one of my generals will deliberately enter into such a conflict in order to save England from her fate and frustrate my plans.

It's only about one month.

Around June 15-20, I plan to begin a massive transfer of troops to the west from your border.

At the same time, I kindly ask you

do not succumb to any provocations (my detente. -

I.B), which may take place on the part of my generals who have forgotten their duty. And, needless to say, try not to give them any reason. If a provocation by any of my generals cannot be avoided, I ask you to show restraint, do not take retaliatory actions and immediately report the incident to me through the communication channel known to you. Only in this way will we be able to achieve our common goals, which, I think, we have clearly agreed upon.

I thank you for meeting me halfway in a matter known to you and I ask you to excuse me for the method that I chose to deliver this letter to you as soon as possible.

I continue to hope for our meeting in July.

Sincerely yours, Adolf Hitler.

May 14, 1941."

While Stalin enjoyed reading his Berlin friend's letter, Hitler himself read with no less pleasure the memorandum of the German Foreign Office drawn up by Schnurre's commercial adviser. Thus, Schnurre, who, in the summer of 1939, together with the Soviet attache Astakhov, laid the foundation for such a warm and intimate relationship that had developed by that time between the leaders of the two countries.

In this document, which was called the "Second Memorandum on German-Soviet Economic Relations", adviser Schnurre reported:

"1. Negotiations with First Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Trade of the USSR Krutikov, which ended a few days ago, were conducted by Krutikov in a very constructive spirit.

2. As in the past, difficulties arose in connection with the fulfillment of German obligations on

deliveries to the USSR, especially in the field of armaments. However, the failure of Germany to fulfill its obligations will begin to affect only after August 1941, since until then Russia is obliged to make deliveries in advance.

3. Great difficulties have been created by endless rumors about an imminent German-Russian clash. These rumors are causing serious concern to the German industry, which in some cases already refuses to send to Russia the personnel needed to fulfill contracts.

4. I have the impression that we could present economic demands to Moscow, even going beyond the scope of the agreement of January 10, 1941, requirements that could satisfy the German needs for products and raw materials within the limits greater than stipulated by the agreement ...

Advisor to Schnurre. May 15, 1941"

On May 16 both Moscow and Berlin breathed a sigh of relief. And took a breath.

Numerous intelligence reports set the date for the German attack on May 15th.

In Berlin, after the hooligan trick of Rudolf Hess, there was information that Stalin, who had lost his patience and, realizing how he was being fooled, would give the order to attack. Moreover, German intelligence determined May 15 as the date for the final preparation of the Red Army for delivering a long-planned strike.

Everyone seemed to be right, but nothing happened.

On May 10, 12, 13 and 14, Stalin held secret meetings with Timoshenko and Zhukov, honing the final details of the mobilization plan and its main offspring, Operation Thunderstorm.

On May 16, the plan was presented in its final version. Its conditional name MP-41 was approved on February 12, 1941, when General Zhukov, having assumed the post of Chief of the General Staff, introduced him to Comrade Stalin.

The implementation of this plan, both in the center and in the field, was supposed to be completed by July 1, 1941. The calendar work plan was approved by Zhukov on February 19, 1941, and instructions on the procedure, development and maintenance of the plan were given to the fronts (districts) in early March.

In its final form, the MP-41 mobilization plan provided for the deployment of the USSR Armed Forces as part of the 303rd divisions, not counting the NKVD troops, separate airborne units and special forces.

In his speech on May 5, Comrade Stalin boasted to the graduates of the military academies that the Red Army already had 300 divisions.

Now he was pleased to know that he was wrong.

The divisions are no longer 300, but 306, and in the near future their number will be increased to 309. By August 1941, the estimated number of divisions will be 344. Of these, currently deployed: 200 rifle divisions, 61 tank divisions, 31 motorized divisions, 13 cavalry divisions, 348 air regiments, 5 airborne corps with independent controls, 10 separate anti-tank artillery brigades of the RGK, 94 corps artillery regiments, 72 artillery regiments of the RGK.

Not counting the troops of the NKVD, the size of the army had already exceeded 8 million people and was supposed to reach 8.9 million people by July 1. The number of tanks by July 1 was supposed to be about 37 thousand units (by now there were already 27.5 thousand). The number of aircraft of all types has already reached 32,628, of which 22,171 were combat vehicles. The troops already had more than 106 thousand artillery and mortar barrels of various calibers. More than 75% of the total number of armed forces was deployed on the Western border in two strategic echelons. The formation of the third strategic echelon has also begun [78].

On May 13, Zhukov ordered the deployment of 5 armies of the second strategic echelon. By this order, the 22nd (General F.A. Ershakov), the 21st (General V.F. Gerasimenko) and the 19th (General I.S. Konev) armies began to advance from the Ural, Volga and North Caucasian military districts on the border of the rivers Western Dvina and Dnieper. At the same time, the 16th Army of General M.F. Lukin and the 20th Army of General F.N. Remezov were sent to the South-Western Front (Kiev Special Military District), where they were supposed to form the reserve of the High Command. All these armies and the units attached to them were to deploy on the lines indicated by him in the period from June 1 to July 3.

On May 14, People's Commissar of Defense Timoshenko ordered the early release of cadets from military schools and their immediate deployment to the troops. On May 15, Zhukov submitted to Stalin a draft decree on additional conscription into the army of 800,000 reserve men under the guise of training camps, relegating this event to the end of May - the beginning of June.

On May 16, 1941, the plan for Operation Thunderstorm was finally approved, edited and presented to Stalin on May 15. It was this plan, stored in red sealed envelopes with the inscription "Open upon receipt of the Thunderstorm signal," that gave the semi-official name to this operation. Officially, as is usual in Soviet office work, the document was designated as "The plan for the strategic deployment of the forces of the Soviet Union in the event of a war with Germany and its allies." The plan was drawn up under the leadership of Zhukov by Generals Vasilevsky and Vatutin. It was marked "Top Secret" and "Personally Only" and addressed directly to Comrade Stalin, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, indicating that this copy was the only one before it was approved.

Unlike the previous ones, this last version of the "Thunderstorm", according to which it was supposed to act, was drawn up, firstly, taking into account the implementation of the Mobilization Plan (MP-41) and, secondly, it completely lacked "new speech" and no one unnecessary preambles like: "If the Soviet Union is attacked ...", etc. All formulations were simple, clear and unambiguous [79].

The preamble to the plan stated that "to ensure its implementation, it is necessary to carry out the following measures in advance, without which it is impossible to launch a surprise attack on the enemy both from the air and on the ground:

1. Conduct a covert mobilization of troops under the guise of reserve training camps - 80% completed.
2. Under the guise of leaving for the camps, make a hidden concentration of troops closer to the western border, first of all, concentrate all the armies of the reserve of the High Command - performed.
3. Secretly concentrate aviation from remote districts on field airfields and immediately begin the deployment of aviation rear services - 75% completed.

4. Gradually, under the guise of training camps and rear exercises, to deploy the rear and the hospital base is being carried out.

"The first strategic goal of the actions of the Red Army troops," the plan further said, "is to defeat the main forces of the German army deployed south of the Brest-Demblin line ... northern wing of the German front and seize the territory of former Poland and East Prussia.

The immediate task is to defeat the German army east of the Vistula River and in the Krakow direction, for which:

a) deliver the main blow by the forces of the Southwestern Front in the direction of Krakow, Katowice, cutting off Germany from the allies;

b) deliver an auxiliary strike by the left wing of the Western Front in the direction of Sedlec, Demblin, with the aim of pinning down the Warsaw grouping and capturing Warsaw, as well as assisting the Southwestern Front in defeating the enemy's Lublin grouping;

c) to conduct an active defense against Finland, Hungary and Romania and be ready to strike against Romania if the situation is favorable ...

... III. Based on the above strategic deployment plan, the following grouping of the USSR Armed Forces is envisaged:

1. The ground forces of the Red Army, consisting of 198 rifle divisions, 61 rifle divisions, 13 cd - a total of 303 divisions and 74 artillery regiments of the RGK, should be distributed as follows:

a) the main forces consisting of 163 rifle divisions, 58 infantry divisions, 30 infantry divisions and 7 infantry divisions (258 divisions in total) and 53 artillery regiments of the RGK should be in the West, of which: as part of the Northern, North-Western, Western and South-Western fronts - 136 rifle divisions, 44 TD, 23 MD, 7 CD (total 210 divisions) and 53 RGK artillery regiments; as part of the reserve of the High Command behind the South-Western and Western Fronts - 27 rifle divisions, 14 rifle divisions, 7 infantry divisions (48 divisions in total).

b) the rest of the forces, consisting of 35th rifle division, 3rd division, 1st division, 6th division (total 45 divisions) and 21 artillery regiments of the RGK are assigned to defend the Far Eastern, southern and northern borders of the USSR...

IV. The composition and tasks of the fronts deployed in the West (map 1: 1.000.000).

Northern Front (LVO) - 3 armies, and consisting of 15 rifle, 4 tank and 2 motorized divisions, and a total of 21 divisions, 18 regiments of aviation and the Northern Navy, with the main tasks - the defense of Leningrad, the port of Murmansk, the Kirov Railway roads and, together with the Baltic Navy, to ensure our complete dominance in the waters of the Gulf of Finland ... The headquarters of the front is Pargolovo.

Northwestern Front - 3 armies, consisting of 17 rifle divisions, 4 tank, 2 motorized divisions, and a total of 23 divisions and 13 aviation regiments, with the following tasks: after the troops of the Western Front went on the offensive, interacting with the Baltic Navy, to start offensive in the direction of Tilsit-Königsberg, while covering the Riga and Vilna directions with stubborn defense. Front headquarters - Ponevezh.

Western Front - 4 armies, consisting of 31 rifle, 8 tank, 4 motorized and 2 cavalry divisions, and a total of 45 divisions and 21 aviation regiments. Tasks: with the transition of the armies of the South-Western Front to the offensive, the attack of the left wing of the front in the general direction of Warsaw and Sedlec-Radom, to break the Warsaw grouping and capture Warsaw; in



in cooperation with the Southwestern Front, defeat the Lublin-Radom grouping of the enemy, reach the Vistula River and capture the city of Radom with mobile units. The right wing of the front, interacting with the troops of the North-Western Front, cut off the main enemy forces from East Prussia and force the Vistula in its lower reaches. Do not cross the Danish border without special instructions. Front headquarters - Baranovichi.

Southwestern Front - 8 armies, consisting of 74 rifle divisions, 28 tank, 15 motorized and 5 cavalry divisions, and a total of 122 divisions and 91 aviation regiments, with the immediate tasks:

a) with a concentric strike by the armies of the right wing of the front, encircle and destroy the main enemy grouping east of the river. Vistula in the Lublin region;

b) simultaneously with a blow from the Senyawa-Przemysl-Lytutowska front, defeat the enemy forces in the Krakow and Sandomiro-Kielce directions and capture the Krakow-Katowice-Kielce area, meaning to further advance from this area in the northern and northwestern directions to defeat large forces the northern wing of the enemy's front and the capture of the territory of Germany proper with a swift offensive on Berlin;

c) ... to be ready to deliver concentric strikes against Romania. From the regions of Chernivtsi and Chisinau with the immediate goal of defeating the northern wing of the Romanian army and reaching the line of the Moldova River, Iasi.

The document was signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov.

The enemy forces in this regard were estimated as follows.

To date, it was stated in the plan, 86 infantry, 13 tank, 12 motorized and 1 cavalry divisions are concentrated on the borders of the Soviet Union, and in total up to 120 divisions. In the course of our offensive, the Germans and their allies could potentially bring this number up to 180 divisions. However, most likely, the main forces of the German army, consisting of 76 infantry, 11 tank, 8 motorized, 2 cavalry and 5 air divisions, and in total up to 100 divisions, will be deployed south of the Brest-Demblin line to strike in the direction of Kovel-Rovno-Kiev .

In order to prevent this, the plan considered it necessary in no case to give the German command the initiative to act, to preempt the enemy in deployment and attack the German army at a time when it would be in the deployment stage and would not have time to organize the front and the interaction of the military branches.

Stalin knew well what was the matter. The General Staff wanted to start operations as quickly as possible, while the Red Army in almost all respects has a triple advantage over the enemy - a classic advantage for the complete success of an offensive operation.

In the plan of attack presented to him, everything was provided for, except for one and, perhaps, the most important thing. There, even in a recommendatory sense, nothing was said about the date of the start of the operation. It was not said, because the leader forbade it.

All deadlines will be set by him.

Because only he

one has all the information about the situation.

"All deployment activities," the leader ordered, counting something in his mind, "complete by about July 1. Well, let's say, to the 3rd. Not later. And just don't give in

what provocations from the Germans and do not provoke them. And remember, Germany will never go to war with us without doing away with England. And we will choose the right moment ...

Everyone who knew Stalin at that time noticed that from about the second half of May, he suddenly began to fear some kind of provocation, constantly pointing out not to give in to them.

Stalin looked at Zhukov and Timoshenko and saw that none of what he had said reached them. Especially to Zhukov. Beginning with the German invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia, he constantly pestered the leader with his requests to allow the Storm to begin as soon as possible. Well, May 15, finally. Well, June 1st. The general worked 20 hours a day. He not only got a taste for the new position, but actually crushed the spineless and weak-willed Marshal Timoshenko under him.

This inhuman aggressive energy emanating from the new Chief of the General Staff began to alarm Stalin. Hitler is right. Own generals are often more dangerous than any opponent. Someone who, and Stalin knows this, perhaps better than anyone in the world. Hitler dismissed his generals, but he, Stalin, knows how to keep them in such a tether that no one dares even utter a word.

Of course, he understands that there have already been favorable moments when it was possible to inflict a crushing blow on the Germans. But he is waiting not just for an opportune moment, but for the most favorable moment, which will come when Hitler takes the bulk of the troops to the English Channel and throws them across the canal.

Stalin has already prepared the war politically, and only he will decide when the "Thunderstorm" blazes over Europe.

And so that Timoshenko and Zhukov understood everything correctly, he said:

"If you're out there on the border teasing the Germans—moving troops without our permission—then keep in mind that heads will roll.

And he left, slamming the door.

Let the generals scare someone else that 78 German divisions will be able, ahead of us in deployment, to strike in the directions of Riga, Minsk and Kyiv, three times inferior to us in all respects!

The optimism of the leader was not at all shared by Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets, who, oddly enough, continued not only to hold the post of head of the GRU information department, but also to test the patience of his command. In February, Rookie tracked the transfer of another 25 German divisions to the east, in March - 5, in April - 13, and by May 20 - another 30.

As a result, he was horrified that at least 170 German divisions were already concentrated on the Soviet border, and, taking into account the troops of Germany's allies, more than 200. The troops unloaded west of the Radom-Warsaw line and moved to the border by night marches.

An analysis of German rail transport showed that for every echelon arriving at the borders of the USSR, there were two going west. Undercover intelligence reported that these echelons were not bringing new troops to the canal coast, but, on the contrary, were loading and taking away units already deployed there.

But, on the other hand, there was information about the formation in Germany of a powerful airborne corps, special units of the marines and much more, which was not advisable to use in the event of a war with the USSR.

However, the fact that the number of German divisions on the border with the USSR doubled in three months spoke for itself, but the command, as always, did not pay the slightest attention to this fact.

The recruit regularly reported to Golikov detailed reports with the numbers of new German divisions, with the names of their commanders, and indicating where this division came from, where it was deployed and where its headquarters was located.

Golikov did not argue, as he used to, he locked the report in a safe and silently released the Rookie.

However, the materials of the General Staff, which passed through the hands of the Rookie, still told him that up there, they continue to proceed from the premise that 70-80 German divisions are simply trampling against the USSR without starting deployment. Sometimes in the materials flashed the figure of 120 divisions, taking into account the troops of Hitler's allies.

This drove the lieutenant colonel no longer into horror, but into despair, just as a fatal diagnosis made by doctors to one of his relatives and especially close people drives him to despair. This is despair from the realization of one's own helplessness with anything to help.

No less horror was caused by what was happening in the highest echelons of the military leadership of the Red Army.

Being the most experienced and educated general staff officer, behind whom there were two military academies, Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets looked with increasing bewilderment and fear at the wild and completely illiterate actions of General of the Army Zhukov.

In fact, with his coming to the post of Chief of the General Staff in early February 1941, the General Staff of the Red Army ceased to exist as a specialized military institution, symbolizing the "brain of the Army", turning into a branch of the People's Commissariat of Defense, in charge of the distribution of manpower and military equipment according to input from the field. applications.

Zhukov himself turned into People's Commissar for Defense, relegating Marshal Timoshenko to the background and, as such, acted with the volcanic activity of a young pioneer playing war.

The troops were deployed along the border, like checkers in a game of giveaway, in two lines of strategic echelons. There was no operational rear. There was also no preparation of the theater for combat operations.

Between the fronts and at the junctions of the armies, terrible voids gaped, intended by design for the commissioning of the second strategic echelon, but for the time being plugged up with anything or simply open.

Every day, new military units and trains with military materials approached the border. Right in the open air, sometimes even without guards, an unthinkable amount of ammunition and military equipment was stored.

Shells, bombs, cartridges, mines, sometimes in boxes, and sometimes not, towered like Egyptian pyramids above the warehouses in the garrisons and at the district ammunition points.

Clogging access roads and main lines, trains with tanks of diesel fuel and gasoline stretched for many kilometers, endless platforms with tanks, tractors and heavy artillery pieces humped. Aircraft were delivered directly to the airfields in their original packaging. Chaos and confusion reigned.

It became ill at the mere thought that German aircraft could suddenly fall on all this.

The General Staff ceased military scientific activity. There were no conferences with front commanders and commanders to theoretically work out possible scenarios for the development of events and identify the optimal one.

The commanders of armies, corps and divisions knew nothing about the tasks ahead of them. From the sealed envelopes lying in the safes with the inscription "Open upon receipt of the Thunderstorm signal," a cold mysticism blew. But if the commanders, periodically called up for district command and staff games, were still aware of something, then only guesses and general concepts reigned at the level below.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie saw and understood all this. He was sure that Stalin knew nothing about the true situation on the border. Firstly, the true situation is not reported to him, and, secondly, being a purely civilian person, the leader of the party and the people is simply not able to understand all these specifically military issues, which he thoughtlessly handed over to completely illiterate military people.

A recruit, without hesitation, would give several years of his life to be able to make a detailed report in a calm atmosphere to Comrade Stalin and members of the Politburo, explaining to them that the army and the country are rapidly sliding into a trap fraught with a military catastrophe.

But this, of course, was completely impossible to implement.

Too small a man was Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, despite the fact that all the basic military secrets of both opposing sides went through his department and through his analytical brain.

But the Rookie did not give up. He again decided to act through Golikov's head so that his materials would come directly to Zhukov.

But Zhukov was not Meretskov.

He called Golikov and, breathing angrily into the phone, said:

- You, Golikov, that's what ... You finally put things in order in your household. For a long time, your alarmists and provocateurs will pass the English "misinformation" over your head and scare us all here. Find out and report!

Haggard, with eyes red from insomnia, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie continued to sit in his office for days on end, burrowing into the mountains of continuously incoming intelligence information, when on May 21 an unfamiliar general entered him.

The general's surname was Dronov. He announced that he had been appointed the new head of the information department of the GRU.

Does this seem like a surprise to you? – asked Dronov, looking at the pale and distorted face of the Rookie.

Pulling himself together, the lieutenant colonel admitted that, yes, it was a complete surprise. He was not warned even verbally.

He called Golikov and asked when to hand over the cases.

Then the lieutenant colonel was called to the personnel department and offered to go on vacation.

The recruit replied that he was already on vacation, and two vacations a year are not supposed to.

"Nothing," laughed Colonel Kondratov, head of the personnel department, "it's supposed to be in our system. Moreover, you will have to spend it in Odessa in the Razvedupra rest house.

The Lieutenant Colonel understood what was going on. The Odessa holiday home of a closed type was intended for scouts, whose fate had not yet been made a final decision.

In early June, the lieutenant colonel went to "rest." He was lucky, they forgot about him, and he "rested" until the very beginning of the war ...

On May 21, German radio announced the invasion of the island of Crete.

The invasion was carried out from the sea and air. The paratroopers of General Student were landed on the island quite unexpectedly for the British, although intelligence had already been three weeks warned the command about the preparation by the Germans of such an operation. The first wave of paratroopers, parachuted from huge landing gliders to capture the British airfield Maleme, immediately met with fierce resistance. One battalion of paratroopers, dropped east of the airfield, came under murderous fire from the British from the commanding heights and was almost completely destroyed during the landing.

The situation was even worse for the second wave of paratroopers, whose task was to capture the airfields of Rethymnon and Heraklion. The preliminary bomber raid not only did not crush the British defenses, but brought it to a state of highest readiness. Those who landed on parachutes were destroyed by dagger machine-gun fire. Huge landing gliders, which each carried up to a hundred paratroopers, sitting in three tiers, fell apart with a terrible crash, stumbling upon special barriers.

Small, cut off from each other, groups of German paratroopers took up all-round defense, not allowing the enemy to completely destroy themselves. By the end of May 20, there was still nothing to indicate the success of the invasion.

On the morning of May 21, the Germans managed to land the anti-tank battalion of the parachute division from the air. Wave after wave of dive bombers, deployed on the Italian island of Sarpanto, began to fall on the positions of the British. Under their cover, the paratroopers managed to capture the strip of the Malem airfield, where transport aircraft with the first divisions of the Alpine riflemen began to land by noon.

But the next day, wave after wave of German dive bombers began to fall on the British ships.

Three battleships - "Berham", "Warspite" and "Velliant" received direct hits from aerial bombs, causing heavy damage to the ships. Two cruisers - "Gloucester" and "Fiji", together with two destroyers were sunk by aerial bombs, several more ships were damaged. The aircraft carrier Formidable attacked German airfields on the island of Scarpanto with its aircraft, destroying about 20 Junkers. But on the way out, the aircraft carrier was intercepted by dive bombers who took off from the North African airfield. Combat air patrol fighters shot down 8 German bombers, but the rest, breaking through anti-aircraft fire, planted two bombs into Formidable.

Left without air cover, Admiral Kenningham temporarily withdrew his ships from Crete. All along the way of his withdrawal to Alexandria, the frantic "shtukos" - Yu-87 - continuously attacked his ships, sinking one more destroyer and damaging many others, losing 3 more vehicles from anti-aircraft fire.

Heavy transport ships with reinforcements immediately moved to Crete from Greek ports

and cargo for the German landing. Fierce fighting continued in Crete, but the defenders of the island, having no support from the air and from the sea, were already in a hopeless situation.

The German invasion of Crete diverted attention for a moment from another event that happened at the same time.

On the morning of May 20, the British intelligence network in Gotenhafen reported that during the night the battleship Bismarck and the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen had disappeared from the harbor.

Coastal command reconnaissance aircraft were immediately taken into the air. Admiral Sir John Tovey, the commander of the English metropolitan fleet, ordered the patrol cruisers Suffolk and Norfolk to take up positions in the Danish Strait, and Vice Admiral Holland's formation to go to sea and proceed to the alleged point of interception of German ships south of Iceland.

Obedying the order of the commander-in-chief, Admiral Horatio Holland, at nightfall, put out to sea and led his formation to the point of possible interception of the enemy, consisting of the battlecruiser Hood and the battleship Prince of Wales, the second ship of the King George V class, which most recently entered service and has not yet had time to go through a full cycle of combat training.

Admiral Holland carried his flag on the battlecruiser Hood. If there was a ship that was a symbol and embodiment of the sea power of Britain, then it was undoubtedly the battlecruiser Hood, which, not only was not inferior to the Bismarck in armament, size and displacement, but even surpassed it, although it was more than 20 years older.

Meanwhile, the detachment of Admiral Lutyens, surrounded by four destroyers, made his way along the Norwegian coast to the north. Admiral Lutyens, who was surrounded by officers of his headquarters on the flagship bridge of the Bismarck, again, as in February, was faced with the question of which way to break into the expanses of the Atlantic: by the Danish Strait or the Faroe-Icelandic Passage? And again, the admiral chose the Danish Strait, hoping that the fogs and snow whirlwinds prevailing there would again give him the opportunity to slip through unnoticed and drive the English fleet well across the central Atlantic.

Having released the tankers, the Bismarck and Prinz Eugen, together with the destroyers, turned into the Grimstad Fjord south of Bergen in order to replenish fuel supplies and wait out the daylight hours in shelter. There they were discovered by a British reconnaissance aircraft, which took several aerial photographs.

After reviewing the still wet photographs, Admiral Tovey ordered Holland to slow down a little and, keeping on the same course, wait for further orders.

A new reconnaissance aircraft sent to the fiord reported that the German ships had already disappeared from there.

The British, having lost sight of the Bismarck, are searching the Arctic waters with planes and ships, but they cannot find anything. At the headquarters of Admiral Tovey, the opinion is even expressed that after leaving the fiord, the Germans returned to Germany.

Meanwhile, Lutyens had already brought his ships to the northern entrance to the Denmark Strait. Naval intelligence reported to the Bismarck that aerial photographs of Scapa Flow showed that British battleships were still there. Inexperienced Luftwaffe pilots took at face value the plywood models of warships exhibited

in Scapa Flow on purpose to mislead them.

On the evening of May 23, from the foggy haze creeping along the coast of Iceland, from the bridges of German ships they notice the silhouette of an English heavy cruiser. Then another. These are Suffolk and Norfolk. Their radio stations, like hunting horns announcing the rise of a large beast, explode the airwaves, directing Admiral Holland's formation at the enemy.

From Scapa Flow, Admiral Tovey withdraws his flagship battleship King George V and the aircraft carrier Victorious. At sea, they are joined by the battlecruiser Repulse, recalled from guarding the convoy. At full speed, the ships rush to take up a position south of Admiral Holland's detachment if they fail to intercept the Germans at the exit from the Danish Strait.

Throughout the night, the Hood and the Prince of Wales, checking their course with the messages of the patrol cruisers, go at a thirty-knot course in order to intercept the enemy by morning.

At dawn on May 24, at a distance of 17 miles, the signalmen of the Bismarck notice the ships of Admiral Holland's detachment on the horizon.

Admiral Lütjens sees for himself the reliability of German naval intelligence: the Hood, which, according to intelligence, should be off the west coast of Africa, is already holding the Bismarck in the sights of his guns at the southern exit from the Denmark Strait. In addition, intelligence assured him that there were no English battleships at sea at all. They all stand in Scapa Flow!

Mistakenly mistaking the Prinz Eugen for the Bismarck, the Hood unleashes a salvo of its fifteen-inch guns on the cruiser. Shells fall with a significant flight.

At the same moment, the Prince of Wales explodes with a salvo of her ten fourteen-inch guns. Projectiles also fall with a large flight. A second later, Bismarck's fifteen-inch guns roared towards the Hood. On "Hood" opened fire and "Prinz Eugen" from his eight inches.

Having confirmed their brilliant reputation, the German gunners cover the enemy with the very first volley.

English shells again lay down with a flight.

After the second German salvo, a fire breaks out on the Hood.

English shells fall short.

Suddenly, behind the bow superstructure of the English battlecruiser, a huge tongue of flame rises, taking the form of a fireball. The giant ship, raising its bow and stern into the air, slowly and terribly breaks in half.

An English battleship that has just left the factory, having received several hits from the Bismarck, departs, hiding behind a smoke screen.

Rejoicing and fighting excitement reign on the German ships. Especially rejoice at the "Prince Eugen". The heavy cruiser was not hit and suffered no casualties.

Bismarck was not so lucky. The Prince of Wales fired three shells into the German battleship in farewell. One of these shells caused the Bismarck quite serious damage.

Continuing south towards longer nights and endless ocean, Admiral

Lutyens decides to let the Prinz Eugen go on an independent raid into the ocean, and follow himself to St. Nazaire, where there is a battleship dock.

The battleship was left alone, continuing to move south. Fuel gushing from broken tanks. Bismarck's speed drops to 26 knots.

Meanwhile, the British, having come to their senses from the shock caused by the death of the Hood, are taking all measures for a new interception and destruction of the Bismarck.

Almost the entire English fleet goes into the ocean behind one German battleship, following without any security and cover from the sea and air.

The British ships pursuing the Bismarck, having received a false report of German submarines seen in the area, begin to change course frequently.

All this leads to the fact that at dawn on May 25, the British cruisers lose sight of the Bismarck.

The English ships are running out of fuel, the enemy has disappeared, and Admiral Tovey is inclined to think of stopping the pursuit.

On May 26, at 10:30 am GMT, an American flying boat Catalina, operated by an American crew, having taken off from the northern coast of Ireland, finds the Bismarck in the trail of oil trailing behind it.

This was the first time the Americans were directly involved in the war with Germany 7 months before its official start.

Having received information about the location of the Bismarck, Admiral Somerville, hurrying from the south to intercept the Bismarck, orders torpedo bombers to be raised from the aircraft carrier Ark Royal.

Having fallen out of the clouds above the Bismarck itself, the Swordfish, buzzing with stretching wings and chirping engines, rushed to the battleship. The anti-aircraft guns of the desperately maneuvering battleship, trying to avoid the torpedoes intended for it, choked with fire.

Ten torpedoes were avoided, but two hit the target.

One hits the armor belt amidships of the Bismarck and does not cause any harm to the battleship. But the second one turns out to be fatal.

Exploding in the stern, she jammed the ship's rudder, which was placed on board. The Bismarck lost control and could now only move in circles.

Events take a truly dramatic turn. By this time, Admiral Tovey had decided at exactly midnight to stop the pursuit. The ships began to consume the emergency fuel supply, and the battle area was inexorably approaching the border of German aviation. But having learned about the fatal torpedo, Tovey decided to continue the battle, "even if you have to return to the base in tow."

After midnight, a division of English destroyers approached the Bismarck at full speed. Like hounds tormenting a bear before the hunters approach, they circle around the Bismarck all night, trying to get into position for a torpedo attack. But the wounded monster still has enough strength to drive them away. Of the 16 torpedoes fired at the Bismarck, none hit. But the destroyers also manage to dodge the artillery fire of an unguided battleship.

The final act of this tragedy is played out on the morning of May 27th. Approaching the battlefield



Admiral Tovey's battleships, joined at night by the Rodney carrying nine sixteen-inch guns.

The British, keeping to the optimal heading angles from which the towers of the Bismarck walking in circles are not able to operate, begin to shoot him.

Around 10 o'clock in the morning, the return fire of the Bismarck ceases. The German battleship has been turned into a continuous whirlwind of roaring flame, but stubbornly keeps to the plan.

Then the Dorsetshire cruiser approaches the dying monster and fires four torpedoes at it point-blank.

At 10:40 on May 27, 1941, slowly sinking astern, the flaming Bismarck, without lowering the flag, sets off for the deep ocean.

The cruiser Dorsetshire and the destroyer Maori, despite the rough sea, pick up 110 people from the Bismarck crew. Among them, only one officer - Lieutenant Baron von Mullenheim-Rechberg. According to the testimony of the prisoners, Admiral Lutyens and the Bismarck commander, Captain 1st Rank Lindemann, decided to share the fate of their ship, one of the most dramatic in the short history of the German fleet.

## Chapter 16

Excitement reigned in Moscow. Say what you like, but the Germans are great! Hitler remarkably demonstrated that his threat to invade England was not empty.  
words.

The operation to capture the island of Crete can be considered a prologue to the landing on the British Isles. Just as Crete was captured, the foothold in the south of England will be captured. All the wise men who argued with figures and facts that an invasion of England was impossible were put to shame and fell silent.

The British evacuated Crete. Their vaunted navy was unable to prevent a German invasion without an enemy at sea.

Now the Germans are deploying an entire airborne corps on the northern coast of France. Hundreds of transport planes and gliders are urgently transferred there from Germany.

True, the restless British did not want to admit their final defeat and inflicted another insult on Stalin.

On May 30, British troops took Baghdad and overthrew the regime of Rashid Ali, with whom Stalin quite recently (May 12) concluded full diplomatic relations. Rashid, along with his friend, the Jerusalem mufti, fled to the Germans, and the damned air base in Mosul continued to be aimed at Baku, unnerving the Kremlin.

Stalin said nothing. Let them have fun on the eve of death.

Since June 1, almost a million more spares have been called up to the Red Army under the guise of training camps. No one even made a special secret out of this.

Even the army newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda openly announced:

"In units of the Red Army, retraining of called-up privates and junior commanding officers is being developed. As many as hundreds of thousands of fighters will join the army. The task of the cadres of the Red Army is to enable these hundreds of thousands of fighters to master new military equipment in a short time.

On June 2, Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks Shcherbakov made a report "On the Current Tasks of Propaganda," where, repeating almost word for word Stalin's speech of May 5, he added:

"

The Red Army is ready to defend its own land in a foreign land." It was magnificent, and therefore met with deafening applause.

According to the latest report presented to him by the General Staff, Stalin knew that the Red Army already had 23,457 tanks ready for immediate action and about 11,000 more undergoing factory tests and various stages of repair [80].

As stipulated by the Mobilization Plan! 537 heavy KB tanks and 1024 new T-34 tanks have already been sent to the Western border districts alone. More than 20,000 aircraft are deployed in the European part of the USSR alone, of which 17,000 are combat aircraft.

Such a huge superiority in forces gave confidence in the successful outcome of the operation in any, even the most unexpected, turn of the scenario.

Today, Beria presented him with the latest reports from secret agents, in whose networks all foreigners who were in Moscow, and indeed in the entire Soviet Union, floundered.

From Beria's face, Stalin, while still looking through the reports, realized that the General Commissar of State Security had come to him to report on something much more important than the messages of the secret police. And I wasn't wrong.

Beria always liked to start small, and now he presented Stalin with a really important document.

Arrested artillery designers and engineers admitted during interrogations that their wrecking activities aimed at disrupting the production of the latest types of weapons in the USSR were personally directed by the people's commissar for armaments, Vannikov himself.

Stalin carefully read the presented document twice.

He looked very upset. After all, they worked together with Vannikov in the Baku underground and in the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate. How do enemies disguise themselves!

Beria also shook his head sadly.

On the same night, People's Commissar for Armaments Boris Vannikov was arrested and sent to the Sukhanov prison.

A day later, it was announced that thirty-two-year-old Dmitry Ustinov had been appointed the new People's Commissar for Armaments. He was ordered to dramatically increase the production of armaments.

On June 10, 1941, the Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, was invited to the permanent

Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs of England Cadogan. After the usual exchange of greetings, Cadogan said: "Mr. Ambassador, I have invited you to make an extremely important announcement. I ask you to take a sheet of paper and write down everything that I dictate to you. Then Cadogan read out information from British intelligence, which listed the German divisions deployed on the border with the USSR.

Maisky knew very well that for forwarding such messages, one could at least earn a reprimand with entry, but nevertheless he transmitted the message to Moscow marked: "English disinformation."

In Moscow, they quickly became convinced that the next "disinformation" that came from London almost completely coincided with the provocative reports of Lieutenant Colonel Novobrants expelled from the GRU. This once again proved that the politically immature lieutenant colonel was the victim of an English provocation.

Work in the General Staff was in full swing, not stopping for a second, day or night.

The border districts of the front were suffocating from oversaturation with troops and all types of military supplies.

The General Staff explained to the commanders of the district fronts that as soon as they moved forward, echelons with cargo would follow them, planes would fly to new airfields, tank formations, divided into waves, would disperse across the European plains, and second-echelon armies would come in their place.

But it was not so easy to hold back such a huge army, clearly aimed at the West and exercises, and staff games, and political pursuits, and aggressive state ideology.

Cases of shootings of border guards have become more frequent.

The aviation of the border districts constantly violates the German border, making overflights of Memel and Tilsit. The situation is even worse in the center and in the south. Kirponos arbitrarily began to occupy the foreground with his troops.

"Heads will roll!" the great leader warned unambiguously. On June 10, a stern shout signed by Zhukov flew from Moscow to Kyiv: "... Report on what basis parts of the fortified areas of the KOVO were ordered to occupy the foreground." On the same day, an order was issued to all border districts "to ban flights of our aviation in the border

lane..."

On June 11, a top secret orientation flew to the headquarters of the border districts, delivered by special-purpose courier air mail:

"People's Commissariat of Defense of the USSR

Top secret

June 11, 1941

Special folder

General Staff of the Red Army

Military councils of LVO, PribOVO, ZapOVO, KOVO, OdVO

7 copies.

... According to information coming through intelligence and government channels, in the period from July 4 to 10, 1941, German troops will undertake large-scale military operations against England, including the landing of large air and sea landing forces on the British Isles.

... The headquarters of the military districts (fronts) and the army and corps headquarters subordinate to them by July 1, 1941, be ready to conduct offensive operations ...

People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR

Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Timoshenko

Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army

Army General G. Zhukov

Member of the Main Military Council

Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks A. Zhdanov.

Although the final version of "Thunderstorm" was approved on May 15, Zhukov urged Stalin to make new changes to it. He offered not to waste time on trifles, but simultaneously with actions against Germany, to strike at Romania, limiting himself to temporary defense only on the border with Finland. For this, the Chief of the General Staff proposed creating another front - the Southern, consisting of two armies.

On June 11, Beria and Merkulov presented to Stalin excerpts from the protocol of the confrontation between Proskurov and Rychagov.

Comrade Stalin's worst fears were confirmed.

Of course, Proskurov, Rychagov and the two dozen smaller generals who have so far been arrested turned out to be just the perpetrators of a large-scale conspiracy.

Even after Rychagov's arrest, Stalin suggested that the threads leading to the leadership of the conspiracy lead to the General Staff.

And, as always, he was right!

The criminals admitted that their sabotage and wrecking operations were led by Lieutenant General Yakov Smushkevich, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, who now holds the position of Assistant Chief of the General Staff (i.e. Zhukov) for aviation. He was recruited by fascist intelligence back in Spain, where he was known under the pseudonym "General Douglas".

"Druzhok Zhukov," prompted Beria to Stalin silently reading the documents. The leader sighed. Everything is correct. He commanded aviation at Khalkhin Gol in 1939, where he destroyed many Japanese aircraft for camouflage and received a second Gold Star.

It turns out that the former commander of the Air Force, and now the commander of the Baltic Military District (North-Western Front), Colonel-General Alexander Loktionov, also participated in the plot, regarding whom a decree has already been signed on his promotion to general of the army!

There was a lot to think about!

No, you cannot start a historic event of this magnitude without completely clearing your ranks of traitors and spies! Arrest both! [81]

Merkulov gave a certificate that Smushkevich was in the hospital. He had one leg amputated after a plane crash. Now, it seems, the second one is being amputated.

Stalin allowed himself to joke on the topic that, they say, a hospital is not a church, it does not grant the right of asylum to anyone.

On the morning of June 12, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, Lieutenant-General Smushkevich was arrested right in the hospital, where he had an operation three days ago, and right on a stretcher sent to Sukhanovskaya prison.

On the same day, Colonel-General Loktionov (who had received news of his promotion the day before) was arrested in Riga and transported by plane to Moscow. From the headquarters of the district, the news immediately spread to the headquarters of the armies, and then to the entire district, when a new commander flew to Riga - Colonel General Fyodor Kuznetsov, appointed on the personal recommendation of Zhukov.

General Loktionov was also confronted with Rychagov.

The old general cursed both Rychagov and the investigators.

He was knocked down from a stool with a blow from a rubber truncheon and began to be beaten with boots.

Bloodied, he was again put on a stool and investigator Vlodimirsky asked if he pleaded guilty to being a member of a criminal organization.

"Yes," the valiant general replied, wiping the blood from his face with his palm, "I admit that all my life I have been a member of a criminal organization called the Bolshevik Party."

He was beaten until he lost consciousness and thrown onto the wet concrete floor of the solitary confinement cell.

On June 12, 1941, a directive flew to the district fronts to begin moving troops to their original positions in order to complete the deployment, as ordered earlier, by July 1. Everything was done according to a method that has been worked out for a long time. The deployment was carried out under the guise of camp fees. However, the troops were asked to move only at night.

"June 12," the documents say, "the command of the border districts

under the guise of exercises and a change in the location of summer camps, it began the covert deployment of troops already in the second echelons.

The Western Front (Zap. VO) also sets in motion.

"Immediately, upon receipt of the directive of the People's Commissar of June 12, the promotion of rifle corps from the rear areas closer to the state border began according to the deployment plan."

A gigantic army on the entire vast front from the Baltic to the Black Sea began to stir, secretly turning around in their original positions.

Behind them, at the turn of the Western Dvina and Dnieper rivers, the armies of the second echelon.

Not later than July 1, it was ordered to complete the advance and take up initial positions for the offensive of 12 armies of the first echelon.

Another 5 armies are in the reserve of the main command and on secondary sections of the border.

The world has not known such power since the campaigns of Genghis Khan! But Genghis did not have tanks, planes, artillery, chemical weapons and telegraph.

"... The hour has come. On June 19, I begin to remove troops from the eastern border, as you can easily see when the engines of the combat vehicles roar, following for loading to the nearest railway stations. We are catastrophically short of cargo tonnage and personnel. Apparently it will be necessary, without any publicity, of course, to urgently withdraw German ships from all ports of Sweden, Finland and the USSR, as well as from the Danube.

Frankly, I am very concerned about the state of the Wehrmacht ...

The most dangerous time is approaching. Unfortunately, the rumors spread by the British about an imminent conflict between us greatly affected the mood of the troops. To be frank, this was facilitated by the call-up of more than a million reservists officially announced by you. There is an opinion among the troops that when they march on the British, you will order your troops to advance on Germany ...

In this regard, I earnestly ask you to make some official statement, refuting the English speculation and making it clear to my valiant soldiers that they can turn their bayonets to the west with the same confidence as last summer without fear for safety. their rears.

I confess that I fear my generals even more than the English, and therefore I appeal to you again with a request not to give them any reason to even try to frustrate the plan, which I consider the goal of my life ...

Sincerely, Adolf Hitler."

By order of Stalin, Molotov drew up the necessary document.

Stalin carefully read it, endorsed it and gave it back to Molotov.

He immediately went to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, where the German ambassador Schulenburg was summoned late in the evening.

"No. 1368 of June 13, 1941.

People's Commissar Molotov has just handed me the following text of the TASS report, which will be broadcast on the radio tonight and published tomorrow in the newspapers:

"... In the English and in general in the foreign press, rumors began to be circulated about the proximity of the war between the USSR and Germany. According to these rumors:

1. Germany allegedly presented the USSR with claims of a territorial and economic nature ...
2. The USSR allegedly rejected these claims, in connection with which Germany began to concentrate its troops near the border of the USSR in order to attack the USSR.
3. The Soviet Union, in turn, began to intensively prepare for war with Germany and is concentrating its troops near the border of the latter.

Despite the obvious senselessness of these rumors, responsible circles in Moscow nevertheless considered it necessary, in view of the stubborn exaggeration of these rumors, to authorize TASS to declare that these rumors are clumsily concocted propaganda of forces hostile to the USSR and Germany, interested in further expansion and outbreak of war. TASS states that:

1. Germany did not present any claims to the USSR ...
2. According to the USSR, Germany also strictly observes the terms of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, like the Soviet Union; in view of which, in the opinion of Soviet circles, rumors about Germany's intention to break the pact and launch an attack on the USSR are devoid of any grounds...
3. The USSR, as follows from its peace policy, observed and intends to comply with the terms of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact ...
4. The purpose of the summer gatherings of the reserve Red Army and the upcoming maneuvers is nothing more than training the reserve and checking the operation of the railway apparatus ... "

Schulenburg".

The next day, the TASS statement was published in all Soviet newspapers, starting with Pravda, and was periodically broadcast like a radio beacon.

On the same day, June 14, 1941, special detachments of the NKVD began the mass deportation of the population from the alleged operational rear of the fronts. The territories of all three Baltic republics, areas of Western Ukraine, Western Belarus and Bessarabia were considered as such.

The detachments acted clearly, according to pre-compiled lists.

The soldiers of the NKVD, with the support of the police, broke into the houses, gave 10 minutes to get ready, stuffed trucks with people, some were driven on foot to the station, where the trains of goods were already waiting. People were herded in whatever they were, and stuffed boxcars carried them non-stop to eastern Siberia.

Only 7,000 families were deported from Tallinn, 11,000 from Riga, and 10,000 from Kaunas thousand.

Things were not going so smoothly in the countryside. Many scattered through the forests, forming semi-spontaneous resistance units, which were very useful to the soldiers of Field Marshal Leeb in just a week.

All Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Gomel, Lvov, Galician and other SS divisions, formed by the Germans from fled and hidden husbands, whose mothers, wives, children and old people were thrown into Siberia on the right death.

Without agreeing (I would like to think), on the same day the Germans launched a similar action on their side, but on a much larger scale.

But the main thing was the following: all Russians living in Germany and in the territories occupied by the Germans, aged 16 to 50, regardless of gender, were subject to temporary detention until further notice.

Ribbentrop showed Schulenburg's telegram to Hitler.

Hitler was calm, as is the calm of a gambler who is about to break the bank, bluffing without a single trump card in his hands and waiting for the moment when his partner, a professional cheat, relaxes, because he has all four aces and two more hidden in his sleeve. Then you can, brushing the cards to the floor, stun the sharper with a candelabra, grab the money and then arrange a fight with everyone present, hoping for Providence ...

What seemed like a hopeless undertaking, it seems, began to succeed.

An absolutely incredible amount of work has been done over the past three months.

From mid-February 1941, troops were concentrated and deployed on the borders with the USSR.

In addition to the 26 divisions on the Soviet border in the summer of 1940, from February 20 to March 15, 1941, 7 infantry divisions were redeployed to the East. In the period from March 16 to April 10, 1941, 19 divisions were transferred to the East as part of the second echelon. The transfer of the third echelon, consisting of 17 divisions, was carried out from April 11 to May 21. Most of the divisions came from the West, and two from Germany.

From May 22, German rail transport was switched to an accelerated schedule, and the concentration of troops in the East increased dramatically. From May 22 to June 5, 11 infantry and 9 security divisions were deployed as part of the fourth echelon. On June 5, there were 89 infantry divisions in all three army groups.

The fifth echelon, consisting of 14 tank, 12 motorized, 2 infantry, 3 light infantry divisions and 2 motorized brigades, began the transfer on June 6 and was supposed to complete it on the 18th.

By the beginning of the operation, according to the Barbarossa plan, fuel reserves were created for a 700-800 km march for all types of combat vehicles and vehicles. Each infantry division had two rounds of ammunition, and the tank division had three. This should have been enough for the first 10 days of fighting.

On June 14, Hitler called the last meeting on the implementation of the Barbarossa plan. After listening to the reports of the commanders of army groups and tank groups, clarifying a number of issues related to the interaction of the Wehrmacht with the Romanian, Hungarian and Slovak troops, Hitler determined the final date of the attack - at dawn on June 22.



Conditional signal for the offensive "Dortmund".

Having dined with the generals, Hitler then gave them a long speech. Pointing out that he was placing the fate of the country in the hands of the army, Hitler emphasized that it was absolutely impossible to tolerate such a powerful army on its borders as Stalin's. He believes in his army and is sure that the Bolshevik army, as well as the Bolshevik ideology, will be destroyed quickly and decisively.

Everyone will forever remember his words spoken on the eve of the attack on the USSR: “

Better a terrible end than horror without end.” These were not Hitler's words. These are the words of Goethe. But everyone understood that it was they he carried in his soul, seeing the noose already tightened around his throat.

Comrade Stalin had his own problems. When making decisions, he thought them over from all sides, isolating especially dangerous consequences. Thinking of throwing the army on a European campaign, the leader clearly saw the main danger: the inevitable wide contacts of the Red Army soldiers with the population of the occupied territories, who profess a completely different morality than the Soviet people.

Now, however, times are different. Behind the two echelons of the invading armies, NKVD divisions were deployed. Political and special departments permeate the army to the level of horns and platoons. Secret directives warned political agencies and special departments of personal responsibility for unauthorized contacts between servicemen and the local population.

In turn, the Military Councils of the districts (fronts) report that with such a sharp increase in the number of armed forces, an acute shortage of middle-level political officers from the regiment and below was discovered. Political schools are unable to cope with the new tasks, and their number, unlike all other schools, has practically not increased in recent years.

On reflection, Stalin decided that the comrades were right.

It was decided to call into the army a certain number of released party workers from enterprises and institutions, carefully selecting them through the city committees and regional committees. Shcherbakov determined their number at 3,500, but Stalin pointed out that the upcoming hostilities would inevitably lead to their decline, and therefore set the figure at 3,700 people.

On June 14, the new commander of the Northwestern Front, Colonel General Kuznetsov, gave the order on the occasion of his assumption of office. Rumors about the arrest of General Loktionov had already spread throughout all parts of the district front, which made the personnel in a fever. It was necessary to bring people to their senses and calm them down.

“Today, more than ever,” the order of Colonel-General Kuznetsov said, “we must be in full combat readiness ... Everyone must firmly and clearly understand that at any moment we must be ready to carry out

any combat mission.

Already Kuznetsov knew well what combat mission lay ahead.

On the same day, the deployment of the rifle corps of the Southwestern Front to their original positions began. The advance of troops was carried out under the guise of their redeployment to a new camp site.

On the Western Front, by order of Army General Pavlov, units of rifle corps moved to their original positions. Formations of four tank corps were moved directly to the border.

On the evening of June 14, the People's Commissar of Defense ordered the military councils of the Baltic, Western and Kiev districts to transfer command and control to the front-line headquarters of the North-Western, Western and South-Western fronts deployed in advance.

In particular, in an encrypted telegram given by Zhukov to the Kiev Special Military District, it was stated: "The People's Commissar of Defense ordered: the department to go to Ternopil, leaving the department of the district subordinate to you in Kiev ... district headquarters personnel.

Similar directives were sent to all border districts, including Leningrad.

On June 15, looking through intelligence reports, Stalin was bitterly convinced that almost all of Soviet intelligence had fallen into the networks of Anglo-American provocateurs. Warnings of an impending German attack were pouring in from all sides.

The scouts simply reported what they saw and heard.

The leader was in a good mood in the morning, and therefore allowed himself to write humorous resolutions on the reports.

On the report of the military attache in Berlin, General Tulikov, warning that the war would begin on June 22, Stalin wrote: "Tell this stupid general that this is an English provocation." This is a resolution to Comrade Golikov.

This is followed by a report from the old Cominternist Leopold Trepper personally known to Stalin, who sends his ciphers to the center under the pseudonym Gilbert.

He also assures that the war will begin no later than June 22.

Stalin raised his head from his papers and looked at General Fitin, who was sitting in his office. Sighing, the leader told the chief of foreign intelligence of the NKGB that he was surprised that such a person as Trepper, an old communist intelligence officer, succumbs to the bait of English propaganda. Fitin spread his hands.

Even Dekanozov himself joined the flow of disinformation. What happened to him there? He had already consulted with Beria and Molotov whether it was time to recall Dekanozov and conduct an investigation.

The next disturbing message came from the Baltic.

German merchant ships, not even having finished loading, began one after another to leave the Soviet ports for home. Apparently obeying some kind of prearranged signal received by radio.

Stalin read this summary, mechanically nodding his head. He knew what was the matter.

He knew even more.

About 30 Soviet cargo ships, some of them for almost a month now, are in the roads of various ports in Germany and Denmark. They were to help the Germans in the transfer of the second echelon of troops to England [82].

Of all the intelligence reports, only one received the favorable attention of Stalin. A source in Gotenhafen reported that, according to him, the new battleship Tirpitz - a colleague of the deceased Bismarck - was going to go to sea with the Admiral Scheer on July 10.

On June 16, a completely unexpected directive arrived in all districts.

On Friday, June 20 and Saturday, June 21, it was allowed to release personnel on leave. Officers - until the morning of Monday, June 23.

From Thursday, June 19 until June 23, it was allowed to carry out 25-hour maintenance work in air units, and park days in tank and artillery units. At the discretion of the unit commanders.

This caused general joy.

Only Stalin was not amused.

Beria and Merkulov continued to promote the "Spanish conspirators". The name of Colonel General Stern began to appear too often in the testimony. They asked permission from the leader to interrogate Stern as a witness.

Hero of the Soviet Union Grigory Stern also fought in Spain. For a long time, after the execution of Marshal Blucher, he commanded the Far Eastern Front, and now heads the Air Defense Directorate of the Red Army.

The evidence was there. He fought in Spain, where he joined a criminal group, and, perhaps, he created it.

Stalin thought and said:

Why a witness? You need to interrogate properly. And find out, finally, who led them all. None of the so far identified traitors could lead the entire conspiracy.

Then we moved on to current issues.

Intelligence reports that in the area of Warsaw and in East Prussia all the junction stations are packed with trains. Railway platforms are ready to receive tanks. One of our agents entered the headquarters of the 175th Wehrmacht Infantry Division. All the walls there are hung with maps of the southern regions of England with the development of tasks to capture bridgeheads.

Beria reported that tomorrow the measures for the surrender of the state border by the troops of the NKVD to the management of the fronts would begin.

After that, the border guards will join the NKVD divisions deployed behind the invading armies.

In parallel with the troops subordinate to the Commissariat of Defense, a whole army of NKVD troops has already been created - 18 divisions and separate regiments. Four more divisions are in the stage of formation, which must be completed no later than July 2. Divisions are motorized even better than army rifle divisions, since their tasks are more important. In addition to their protective functions in relation to their own army, they should be engaged in their direct business - to "clean" the rear of the army in the process of its offensive to the West. Everything is modeled on the Baltics,

Poland and Bessarabia. A special post of Deputy People's Commissar of Internal Affairs for the troops has also been created, which is occupied by Lieutenant General Maslennikov.

But this is not enough. On April 23, 1941, by secret order of Stalin, a fundamentally new organization was created: the Directorate of Operational Troops of the NKVD under the command of Lieutenant General of the NKVD Artemiev. This parallel army is ready to solve a wide variety of tasks: from suppressing pockets of resistance remaining in the rear of the advancing Red Army to deporting the population of an average European city within a day.

Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria, commanding, among other things, this huge army, with good reason wears a large star of the Marshal of the Soviet Union on his buttonholes.

On June 17, Colonel-General Grigory Stern was arrested right in his office of the Red Army Air Defense Directorate. He was taken to the Lubyanka inner prison and, without asking a single question, they locked him in a box for those under investigation.

And in Sukhanovka, investigators beat the former People's Commissar for Armaments, Boris Vannikov, in mortal combat. They beat him with rubber clubs, fists, kicked him in the stomach and groin, demanding to name his accomplices. Vannikov fell to the floor, and investigator Rhodes began to stomp on him, jumping on him, shouting: "You say! You will say everything!"

Vannikov roared in pain, wept, but did not testify against anyone.

Then investigator Sorokin remembered that they had a nail-pulling machine in their investigation department, donated by the Gestapo back in 1939.

They brought a typewriter and, for a start, tore off the nail from the ring finger of the former people's commissar's left hand. He lost consciousness. They poured water on them, gave them a sniff of ammonia ... In a completely insensible state, Vannikov signed a testimony, where Generals Gerasimenko, Vertsev, Shelkovy, Charsky, Batov, Khokhlov, Mirzakhanov, Gulyants, Zhezlov, Lazarev, Vetoshkin, Kotov and Ioffe were named as his accomplices.

They were arrested without asking for special permission from Stalin. In a series of rapidly developing events, Gerasimenko was almost forgotten. He was arrested only on July 5 and shot in February 1942.

Meanwhile, Stern was cut off the buttonholes with the stars of the colonel-general, unscrewed the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union and other orders from the tunic, took away the belt and belt, cut off the buttons on the riding breeches, giving out ropes in return, and in this form they took him for interrogation, which, given the high in the past, the position of the arrested person was carried out by the People's Commissar of State Security Vsevolod Merkulov himself.

Investigator Shvartsman was also present at the interrogation, sitting modestly at a corner table, sorting through papers. Merkulov very politely asked Stern not to take time from himself or from them, but to sincerely confess to all crimes in order to alleviate his own plight and reduce guilt before his homeland.

Stern, who was surprisingly calm, asked him what he was accused of?

"We hoped that you yourself would tell us about your crimes," said Merkulov. "Believe me, in your position, locking yourself up is stupid.

To which Stern stubbornly stated that he had not committed any crimes against the motherland and the party. And he has nothing to say.

Then Investigator Shvartsman, with a weary sigh, got up from the table and, going up to Stern, lashed him in the face with a bundle of electrical wires. And so fortunately that he immediately knocked out the colonel-general's right eye. Blood spattered, Stern fell from his chair to the floor.

Merkulov looked reproachfully at Schwartzman. An expensive carpet was laid on the floor, as befits a people's commissar's office.

Shvartsman apologized, saying that his hand was cramped "from proletarian hatred". He wanted to hit him in the neck, but hit him in the face.

I had to call an escort so that they would take Stern for dressing and bring him to his senses, and then sent him to the Sukhanovskaya prison.

On June 17, US President Roosevelt received another letter from Prime Minister Churchill. "Judging by the information from all sources," the British Prime Minister reported, "in the near future the Germans will apparently make the strongest attack on Russia ... If this new war breaks out, we, of course, will provide the Russians with every possible encouragement and assistance, based on that principle that the enemy we need to defeat is Hitler. I do not expect any class political reaction here and I hope that the German-Russian conflict will not create any difficulties for you.

Roosevelt responded immediately, assuring Churchill that if the Germans attacked Russia, he would immediately publicly support "any statement the Prime Minister makes hailing Russia as an ally".

The President and Hopkins were in Roosevelt's inner office, adjacent to the Oval Room of the White House.

The President was sorting through his huge collection of postage stamps, and Hopkins, disheveled and unshaven, lay on the sofa, looking through the newspapers.

When Roosevelt read Churchill's message to Hopkins, he asked:

- If Stalin attacks first, what will we do? Support Hitler?

Roosevelt laughed.

Yes, we would be in the most stupid position. By the way, many senators are just like that. If Stalin does this, he will destroy the whole scheme that we have developed for the next five years. But luckily I'm sure he won't. He's waiting to land in England. Everyone assured him of this, not just the Germans. Adolf is already well aware that he is finished, and therefore he will put all the strength that he still has into his blow. It will be a terrible blow, Harry, trust me. Stalin will not recover from it soon, and Hitler will never recover. Of this I have no doubt. Something else worries me. We need to go to war, but I don't know how to do it.

"Maybe we shouldn't rush," Hopkins suggested, "let the guys at Los Alamos finish the job. Hitler gave us an invaluable gift, dividing even physics into Jewish and Aryan.

"No," the president said. - Groves reported to me that the completion of work cannot be expected before 1944. It will be late.

The President thought for a moment, then said dreamily:

"It once took the bombing of the battleship Maine in Havana to stir up the average American and force him to demand a declaration of war on Spain from the government. It was because of that war that America was accepted into the club of the great powers of the world. What should explode now, so that our kind man in the street would demand from the government to immediately enter the war?

"Frank," Hopkins laughed back, "you are the supreme commander. Give the order to our guys to bomb some Jap base in Indochina. As far as I know them, they will immediately bomb something from us in response. And Congress will have no choice but to authorize your actions.

"No," Roosevelt said firmly. - In no case. We are a democratic, peaceful country. We must have an impeccable reputation. We will continue to piss them off. Hitler and the Japanese have bad nerves, they are prone to tantrums, and something is bound to explode.

Before the explosion expected by the president, there was already quite a bit - just over five months. In the terrible explosion that followed at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, even the theoretical possibility for Hitler and his allies to get out of this terrible war was finally buried.

A completely unique collection of books has gathered in Comrade Stalin's bookcase. Their authors have long been either stabbed to death, or shot, shot, crushed by cars, tortured to death in dungeons, ground up in camps, erased from life and memory. Books, of course, have long been withdrawn from use and from all libraries in the country, and for keeping them at home one could get a good camp term.

And in the bookcase of Comrade Stalin, they not only survived, but are full of bookmarks.

"There can be only one state between our proletarian state and the rest of the bourgeois world – a long, stubborn, desperate war... The working class will be forced to go over to the attack when favorable conditions arise for this... The Red Army, the main weapon of the working class, must be prepared so as to fulfill its offensive mission on any sector of the future front. The boundaries of this front are determined in the nearest turn by the limits

the entire mainland of the Old World.

Great words. This was said by Mikhail Frunze back in 1922.

"It is most profitable to conduct an offensive operation against an enemy standing still ... The most profitable destruction is achieved by capturing the enemy, since, in addition to weakening the enemy's army, prisoners economically strengthen the rear of the winner."

This is Tukhachevsky. It is terrible to remember what a scoundrel turned out to be. And how well he understood the need for rapid "Sovietization" of the occupied territories:

And here is another great quote, this time by himself. As always, clear and simple, as  
and all ingenious:

"The main function of the socialist state under the conditions of the era of the victory of socialism on one-sixth of the earth is to organize victory over the capitalist encirclement ... In order to destroy the danger of foreign capitalist intervention, it is necessary to destroy the capitalist encirclement."

On June 18, it was reported from the districts and front headquarters that the preparation of the theater of operations for the offensive would be completed by the evening.

Demining of bridges and passages has begun on all sections of the border. Special detachments of the NKVD are deployed right on the bridges.

Work is in full swing in the headquarters of all levels. At the regimental level, the commanders of infantry and tank battalions receive new maps of adjacent territories with the order: study them and prepare for a specific combat mission.

On the evening of June 18, the headquarters of formations and formations on the entire front from the Barents to the Black Sea were raised on combat alert and put on full alert. The troops began to move directly into the border zone.

Then the commanders of the border districts and fronts gave the order: to bring the level of combat readiness of the armies of the second echelon to the level of combat readiness with the troops of the first echelon.

Radio operators, telephone operators, teletype operators did not leave their devices at the headquarters of the fronts, districts, corps and divisions, waiting for the "Thunderstorm" signal.

Everyone, up to the front commanders, slept at combat posts, without undressing, but only loosening their belts. There was no signal...

Late in the evening, Stalin, who was at a nearby dacha, was informed that a car of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs had driven up to the gates of the dacha territory, asking to be received on a matter of extreme importance.

Beria was paler than usual and was very nervous.

He reported to the leader that a general had been discovered leading the conspirators from the General Staff.

- Meretskov? – immediately guessed the leader.

Beria nodded his head mournfully.

This was a surprise! Former Chief of the General Staff, one of the main developers of the Thunderstorm! All military intelligence, military and naval attachés in all countries, all command and control, all strategic plans and tactical developments closed on him!

In the dead of night, Army General Zhukov was raised from his bed and called to Stalin's dacha.

Upon learning of Meretskov's betrayal, the current Chief of the General Staff felt unwell and sank heavily into a chair, holding his hand to his heart.

The eyes of Comrade Stalin burned with an unearthly flame.

At first, they wanted to arrest Meretskov right at dawn today. But Stalin himself and Zhukov, who came to his senses, told Beria that this should not be done.

Too big figure. His arrest and the inevitable rumors about it may for some time disorganize the entire work of the General Staff. No! Meretskov should simply disappear. Since he has already been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the North-West Direction, then no later than

June 21 departs for Leningrad. There he was arrested along with all those accompanying him and secretly transported back to Moscow.

Then a natural question arose: who should be sent as commander-in-chief of the direction to the North-West?

"Send Voroshilov," Stalin ordered wearily, remembering the only person who could still be trusted in this sinister web of betrayals and conspiracies.

On the morning of June 19, the American broadcasting company Columbia Broadcasting Systems reported that the Soviet Union had attacked German troops at 15 points along the border. Fierce battles ensued.

The entire world press is already writing about the Soviet-German conflict as an almost accomplished fact. The general tone of the international press emphasizes that the Germans have very little chance of success if conflict breaks out.

On the other hand, Pravda came out from the front, completely refuting such fabrications. The front was called: "Summer rest of the working people."

Around 10 a.m. along the entire border, which was now called the border with Germany, the engines of thousands of Wehrmacht tanks and armored personnel carriers roared.

This was immediately reported to Comrade Stalin when he arrived at the Kremlin at about one in the afternoon.

The leader limited himself to a mysterious smile, sucking on an extinct pipe.

On June 19, Soviet bombers, fighters and attack aircraft began flying to field airfields near the border.

Obedying the order of the People's Commissar of Defense, the People's Commissar of the Navy, Admiral Kuznetsov, transferred all fleets and flotillas to operational readiness No. 2, warning of the transition to full combat readiness No. 1 in the coming days.

On Beria's desk lies an informative report by a secret informant embedded in the American embassy. He reports that the American journalist Alice Leon-Moutut told everyone that the second secretary of the German embassy, having met her, said literally the following: "I regret that I misinformed you by indicating June 17 as the date of the invasion. The attack will take place on June 21." The American journalist added: "Everyone is already tired of warning the Russians..."

"They should stop warning us as soon as possible," Stalin remarked irritably after reading the message. - The head is already spinning from their provocations. I didn't even expect it to take on such a scale!

The leader got excited and lit his pipe, releasing a puff of smoke.

On his desk are reports brought by General Golikov: the Germans began loading troops into echelons.

- Let them warn their English friends to fight for their islands



better prepared.

The leader is irritated. Meretskov's betrayal does not come out of his head. What did this scoundrel manage to convey to the Germans about the Thunderstorm? Wouldn't have ruined the whole operation! Rather, you need to take him and properly interrogate him.

Zhukov reassures Stalin.

- What is the worst option? Will the Germans themselves attack us? Only at the border we have a triple superiority in all respects. We will immediately stop them, surround them and destroy them. And morally even better. Everyone will see that we have been attacked.

But this is unlikely to happen. The Germans are not crazy to go on the offensive with such forces as they have. They all know about our troops.

Now all the border units of the Wehrmacht have been set in motion and, judging by the first reports already coming through the GRU line, they have begun loading at least three divisions into the echelons leaving to the west.

Stalin listens with a tired look to the Chief of the General Staff, following his pointer running around the map with his eyes.

On Stalin's desk lies yesterday's Pravda (for Wednesday, June 18).

"TASS message" is underlined in blue pencil.

It says that a special archaeological expedition of the Leningrad State Hermitage removed a heavy slab of green jade from the tomb of Tamerlane in the Gur-Emir mausoleum in Samarkand, opening the sarcophagus of the great conqueror. The message mentioned that there was an inscription on the slab saying that the one who opened the tomb of Tamerlane would release the merciless spirits of a bloody and devastating war onto his country ...

"Just don't succumb to any provocations," Stalin warned after listening to Zhukov's next report. - Without my personal permission, no one has the right to open fire under any circumstances. Heads will fly.

"Tomorrow," the leader continued, "and by Monday, the state of combat readiness will be removed. Everything is according to plan, including the rest of the front commanders.

On June 20, the English newspaper The Times comes out with a large headline: "Germany and Russia face to face." An entire page is dedicated to the topic.

The New York Times correspondent reported from Ankara: "Diplomatic sources report that the Reich's war with the Soviets may begin within the next 48 hours."

Panic gripped the seaside towns of Romania and Bulgaria. At the height of the season, the first-class Black Sea resorts of the Gold Coast died out. All highways leading from Constanta inland are packed with refugees.

A Swedish government spokesman stated that "his country has already taken all measures so that the Soviet-German war does not take it by surprise."

In Berlin, foreign journalists storm the press center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ritters himself comes out to them. He is bombarded with questions. What do all these rumors mean? Is it true

Is it possible that clashes have already begun on the Soviet-German border? Ritters categorically denied all rumors.

"There are no signs of a crisis in the Soviet capital," a Reuters correspondent reports from Moscow.

The editorial of Pravda is entitled "Against Talkers and Loafers" and calls for fighting for "efficiency in work, against chatter and chatter that covers up inactivity."

The roar of engines continues along the Soviet border.

The tension is unbearable, it seems that it hangs in the air and makes it difficult to breathe.

Commander-in-Chief of the Western Front, General of the Army Pavlov, was very surprised when Corps Commissar General Fominykh, a member of the military council of the front, suggested that he go to a performance that would take place tomorrow at the Minsk District Officers' House.

- What kind of theater is there ?! - tried to wave the commander.

"This is an order," Fominykh replied, not really understanding anything himself.

Colonel-General Kuznetsov was also sent to the theater, and Army General Kirponos was ordered to spend Saturday, June 21, at the Kiev Dynamo stadium - to watch the next match for the USSR football championship.

The Soviet Union will not succumb to any provocations and will not give them any pretext.

"Secret Decree of the Politburo

On the organization of the Southern Front and the appointments of the command staff

June 21, 1941

Special folder

dated June 21, 1941 (The date is inscribed by Stalin's hand.)

1. Organize the Southern Front as part of two armies with the seat of the Military Council in Vinnitsa.
2. Appoint Comrade Tyulenev as commander of the Southern Front, leaving him in the position of commander of the Moscow Military District ... "

The two armies of the new front are the 9th and 18th, aimed at Romania.

They have been deployed for a long time. They just need to be organized into another front.

Stalin read the document and asked:

Zhukov and Timoshenko have a question on their tongues: when will we start Groza?

But Stalin himself answers this question. The Germans will complete the transfer of troops around 1 July. Another two weeks will be needed for the deployment of troops, the organization of headquarters and other things. Landing on the British Isles will take place on July 15-20. Not later than.

And we will start exactly three days after their landing.

Now, the leader continued, they are moving troops and there is a danger that some of their generals, recruited by British intelligence, will try to unleash a conflict on our border in order to disrupt the landing and personally start a war against the USSR. Let them shoot, let them do what they want. Sit silently. It's clear?

The military left. They were replaced by Molotov, who brought Stalin an interesting document.

"Top secret. Ex. No. 1.

Head of the Protocol Department of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR

Comrade Barkov V.N. June 19, 1941

... Having registered the trips of foreigners, I drew attention to the following circumstance: the entire apparatus of the German naval attaché consists of seven Human...

As of June 20, not one of the employees known to me remains in the attaché office, which is somewhat unusual and strange, which I consider it necessary to bring to your attention.

Stalin, although he knew about this from the reports of the NKVD, read the certificate with a smile and silently put it aside. Everything is correct, everything fits. German sailors are needed now at home.

Stalin then asked Molotov if he had seen Schulenburg today.

Molotov received the German ambassador today and, in an extremely blunt manner, demanded an explanation from him about the incessant overflights by German aircraft of the border territories of the USSR.

The German ambassador replied that Mr. Dekanozov should have visited the Imperial Minister of Foreign Affairs and obtained from him all the explanations on this matter. Then Molotov asked why the TASS statement of June 14 was not published in Germany? What is generally dissatisfied with Germany, and what does it want?

An embarrassed Schulenburg replied that he had no information on these matters and should inquire with his government.

At the same time, Dekanozov was ordered to obtain an appointment with Ribbentrop and hand him a verbal note with the following content:

"By order of the Soviet Government, the embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in Germany has the honor to make the German Government

the following statement:

The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, by a verbal note dated April 21, informed the German embassy in Moscow about violations of the border of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics by German aircraft ...

Drawing the attention of the German Government to such a situation, the Soviet Government expects the German Government to take measures to stop violations of the Soviet border by German aircraft.

It was the first of a planned series of notes, the purpose of which was to aggravate Soviet-German relations by presenting new and sharper claims to Germany, the culmination of which should (by design) be reached on the very eve of the invasion.

Stalin pushed aside the intelligence reports, which had tired him with their stupid tendentiousness, and asked Beria if everything was ready for Meretskov's arrest.

Lavrenty Pavlovich reported that everything was ready. They just haven't decided yet where to take it: right on the train or on the platform.

Stalin said that it was better right on the train.

Beria agreed. The entire train brigade is made up of operatives and two neighboring cars are also packed with operatives.

Stalin asked how the investigation was going, what new things had been established?

Beria reported that a picture of a very large conspiracy was already being revealed. Much larger than even in 1937.

Stalin only sighed, shaking his head in dismay, and began to fill his pipe. He was in complete agreement with Comrade Beria.

While Stalin was trying to make sense of the dark and dirty labyrinth, teeming with conspiring generals and agent provocateurs, Hitler, exhausted by the tedious waiting for the "H" hour, wrote a long letter to his only friend, Mussolini.

The letter betrayed the state of mind of the Fuhrer, tormented by his diabolical games in the last days before the attack on his insidious Moscow partner.

"Duce," the Fuhrer poured out his soul, "I am writing this letter to you at a moment when months of hard thinking, as well as endless nervous waiting, ended with the adoption of the most difficult decision in my life. I believe that I have no right to endure such a situation any longer after the last map of the situation in Russia was presented to me...

Both states, Soviet Russia and England, are equally interested in a disintegrated Europe weakened by a long war. Behind these states stands the North American Union in a pose of instigator and expectant.

After the liquidation of Poland, a consistent direction appeared in Soviet Russia,

which, cautiously but steadily, returns to the old Bolshevik tendency to expand the so-called "Soviet, socialist front." In other words, expansion to the infinite limits of the Soviet state...

You see, Duce, they are throwing a noose on us without actually giving us time to do anything, and it is hard to imagine that we will be given such time ... Therefore, after much thought, I came to the conclusion that it is better to break this noose before it is tightened...

The material that I intend to gradually publish about Stalin's plans to crush Europe is so extensive that the world will be more surprised at our patience than at our decision ...

In conclusion, I would like to tell you one more thing. I feel inwardly free again after I have come to this decision. Collaboration with the Soviet Union, with all the sincere desire to achieve final detente, often weighed on me ... I am happy that I have been freed from this moral burden.

With cordial and comradely greetings.

Sincerely yours, Duce, Adolf Hitler.

On a thousand-kilometer line of confrontation, vibrating with tension, like stretched bowstrings of giant bows, two huge armies stood, waiting for the agreed signals: "Thunderstorm" and "Dortmund".

On the right flank of this monstrous grouping, the Northwestern Front, Colonel General Fyodor Kuznetsov, deployed its three armies.

The North-Western Front of the Red Army was opposed by the Army Group "North" under the command of Field Marshal Wilhelm von Leeb, who deployed two of his armies on the 230-kilometer stretch from Memel to Goldap.

On the central sector, on the famous Belostok balcony, the Western Front of General of the Army Dmitry Pavlov deployed his three armies.

They were opposed by Army Group Center, deployed on a 500-kilometer stretch from Goldap to Vlodava, under the command of Field Marshal Fyodor von Bock.

In the narrowness of the Lvov balcony, four Soviet armies of the Southwestern Front, General of the Army Mikhail Kirponos, rubbed their sides.

A separate 9th Army was deployed on the left flank of the front. A second echelon army was deployed behind the lines of the gigantic 9th Army. The actions of the group were supported by ships and aircraft of the Black Sea Fleet. In total, this supergroup aimed at the Balkans had more than 4,000 tanks and 3,000 combat aircraft. About 3 million people were under arms, not counting the personnel of the fleet and the NKVD troops,

This grouping was opposed by Field Marshal Karl von Rundstedt's Army Group South deployed on a 780-kilometer sector.

In total, the grouping of German troops, together with the Romanian and Finnish units, consisted of approximately 4.5 million people, a little less than 400 tanks and 4275 combat aircraft, counting the aircraft of Romania and Finland.

Against them, only on three fronts of the Western theater of operations (not counting the armies of the Northern Front) was deployed an 8 millionth army, built in two strategic echelons and covered from the rear by three separate armies of the NKVD.

Only in the border districts, the Germans were opposed by 11 thousand tanks and another 8 thousand in the armies of the second echelon. How many tanks were in the rifle divisions and in the armies of the NKVD, including their own strength, remains unknown. To me, at least.

From the air, this grouping was covered by 11,000 aircraft and 2,300 long-range bombers that were part of the DBA RGK. Another 8,000 combat troops were in reserve. machines.

Three airborne corps were deployed behind the armies of the first echelon,

The coastal flanks of the fronts relied on the support of powerful and numerous formations of the Navy. The aviation of the fleet (not counting the Pacific) had 6,700 aircraft, more than all the Luftwaffe formations in the east.

Please, I appeal to you, my readers, read this section two, three, four times, for the first time in almost 55 years, pay attention to the balance of power and try to answer at least two questions:

1. Why did Stalin concentrate such a monstrous army on the border?

But this question is so obvious that only former historians of the CPSU with dislocated brains can answer it: "For defense".

The second question is much more interesting:

2. How did the Germans, with their frail forces, manage to defeat and destroy all this monstrous force, so much so that already in September they had to urgently form divisions of the people's militia in order to plug the gaping gaps of the collapsing front with their corpses?

Why did official history declare the loss of 1,200 aircraft in two days of war when there were 11,000 of them a disaster?

Why was the loss of 600 tanks in the first two days of the war also declared a disaster when there were also 11,000 of them?

Where did the gigantic army, aimed at invading Europe on D-Day + 3, go from the German landings on the British Isles?

With all the tactical surprise of the strike, they had to be stopped by July 1. The Panzer Groups of Hoth, Guderian and Kleist, who had rushed forward and were ahead of their infantry by two daily marches, would have been cut off from it, surrounded, crushed, crushed and smeared by the terrible superiority in forces that the Red Army had.

And this would certainly have happened, if not for one circumstance.

If the Red Army resisted.

This was the famous mistake in the third sign made by Comrade Stalin, who liked to simplify everything.

In the dead of night on June 22 - at 2:10 am - General Guderian left for his command post, located 15 kilometers northwest of Brest near the town of Bogukaly. He arrived there at 3:10 am. From 8 pm, the tanks of his group, roaring their gasoline engines, advanced to the border.

Hitler's order was read to the soldiers.

"The hour has come, my soldiers," the Fuhrer addressed the Wehrmacht, "when ... the fate of Europe, the future of Germany and our people are now completely in your hands!"

What about bridges? asked Guderian and was surprised to learn that the Russians cleared the bridges themselves, clearing passages and notches in many areas for the passage of tanks.

The sky in the east began to turn gray.

The day began on June 22, 1941, which fell on a Sunday.

Guderian looked at his watch again. It was 3:15 am.

And ordered to begin artillery preparation.

Late in the evening of June 21, when it became clear to everyone that the Germans were moving their troops to the West in some very strange way - pushing them as far as possible to the borders of the USSR - the last peacetime directive signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov was sent from Moscow to the headquarters of the fronts signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov. In it, the troops were again conjured "not to succumb to any provocative actions that could cause major complications."

When the shooting began at the borders, and the German tanks moved forward, Stalin, "within the framework of the agreement reached," began to try to get through to Hitler in order to complain to the Führer about his undisciplined generals who had taken provocative actions, about the possibility of which the far-sighted Hitler had long warned his Moscow friend.

However, it was not so easy to get through to the Fuhrer from Moscow. But Stalin did it with his usual perseverance. All this looked completely mystical, considering that Schulenburg had already handed Molotov a note declaring war drawn up in accordance with all the rules, and in Berlin Ribbentrop made a corresponding statement to Dekanozov, summoned at dawn.

Did Stalin get the impression that the Imperial Minister of Foreign Affairs, together with the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Germany, acted on behalf of some commander of a Wehrmacht tank division or artillery brigade recruited by the British? One way or another, he continued to call Berlin, and when it became clear that this would not work by telephone, he used the international radio line. In the end, it was possible to contact the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. They instantly appreciated the insanity reigning in the Kremlin and began to fool the great leader, assuring that they did not know anything about this, that everything would be immediately reported to the Fuhrer, and "of course, if everything is as you report, then the guilty will be severely punished." From Moscow they demanded to immediately report everything to Hitler personally. But Hitler in the Reich Chancellery could not be found in any way and offered to contact them tomorrow morning, assuring that they "reported to everyone who needs it."

Here Stalin's patience snapped, and he, agreeing to postpone the negotiations until tomorrow, decided that these negotiations would be much easier to conduct if there were no German troops on our

territory. Therefore, he ordered all fronts to immediately go on the offensive, to drive the Germans out of the territory of the USSR, but not to cross the border until further notice. Apparently the leader still wanted to give Hitler the opportunity to transfer his troops to the English Channel in a calm atmosphere. Therefore, just three and a half hours after the German invasion, the headquarters of the border fronts received the first wartime directive signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov, which ordered: "The troops should attack the enemy forces with all their might and means and destroy them in areas where they violated the Soviet border. From now on, until further notice, the ground troops will not cross the border."

By noon on June 22 in the Kremlin, Stalin, Timoshenko and Zhukov finally realized that the invasion of England was apparently being delayed, since Hitler at this stage preferred to invade the USSR.

And then came the great hour!

It was decided to launch Operation Thunderstorm!

"Thunderstorm, Thunderstorm, Thunderstorm!" - teletypes and transmitters of the People's Commissariat of Defense and the General Staff began to strain on all direct communication lines and radio frequencies.

"Thunderstorm, Thunderstorm, Thunderstorm!"

She rustled and thundered on the still surviving communication lines between the front, corps and divisional headquarters.

From hundreds of safes, with a certain amount of ritual solemnity, thick red packages with the inscription

"Open upon receipt of the Thunderstorm signal.

Packets of operational orders with the names of Prussian, Polish and Romanian cities and towns were taken out of the opened packages, which were ordered to be taken in the first 72 hours after the start of the operation. On the given secret maps, the fat red arrows aimed rapaciously at Warsaw and Copenhagen, at Berlin and Königsberg, at Bucharest, Budapest and Vienna.

On the North-Western Front, the commander of a tank division, the valiant Colonel Ivan Chernyakhovsky, having opened his red envelope, did not hesitate for a minute, threw his tanks into the attack on Tilsit, with the aim of capturing it, to develop an attack on Königsberg, as indicated in the package order. Even under the conditions of June 22, 1941, the tanks of Colonel Chernyakhovsky managed to advance 25 kilometers by crushing the German positions. Only the general situation at the front forced Chernyakhovsky to turn back.

On the Western Front, the tank division of the 14th Mechanized Corps, under the command of the deputy division commander, Lieutenant Colonel Sergei Mednikov, simultaneously with the German tanks, but in the other direction, crossed the Bug and launched an attack on Deblin, as ordered by the opened red packet. With fighting, the division moved forward 30 kilometers and stopped, having used up fuel and ammunition. Lieutenant Colonel Mednikov died.

On the Southern Front, several divisions managed to invade Romanian territory, supported by the heavy fire of the monitors of the Danube Flotilla.



But these were exceptions to the general situation that prevailed on the fronts at the moment when the order was given to start Operation Thunderstorm. Exceptions that don't prove the rule at all.

A few minutes after the start of artillery preparation at the border, Army General Kirill Meretskov was arrested in the fast train "Red Arrow", plying along the Moscow-Leningrad route and back, and transferred to the Sukhanov prison. In Moscow, everyone believed that he became the commander-in-chief of the North-West direction as part of two fronts - the North-West and the North. The fronts, which had already extracted packages with the Thunderstorm from the safes, were ordered to capture East Prussia in the first stage, in the second - the remnants of Finland and Norway and be ready to occupy Sweden. Unfortunately, Colonel Chernyakhovsky did not manage to do this alone ...

Delivered to the Sukhanovskaya prison, General of the Army Kirill Meretskov, who had already been in the clutches of the NKVD in 1937, thought of only one thing: how to quickly deserve a bullet in the back of the head, while avoiding torture and torment. This could be achieved, as he knew from experience, only by telling the interrogators everything they wanted to hear from him. He did not take into account only one thing, that he had experience three years ago, which was somewhat outdated.

By this time, the entire investigative team was already very tired with what could be called "the indefatigable general pride." I had to spend too much time to show the arrested generals that they were not generals at all, but shit, as Lenin liked to say about the entire Russian intelligentsia.

In order for the generals to understand this quickly, a kind of preliminary ritual was developed to "humble their pride" even before the first interrogation.

With Meretskov, as expected, they lovingly cut off the buttonholes with the five stars of the general of the army, unscrewed the orders, tore off the chrome boots, cut off the buttons on the trousers, took away the belt and belt, photographed in front and profile, and then, without asking a single question, began to beat rubber clubs. Further, the entire investigative team urinated on the head of the general of the army lying in blood on the floor and left him to lie in the investigator's urine until the morning.

The fact is that Comrade Stalin personally expressed a desire to take part in the first interrogation of the former chief of the General Staff of the Red Army. We have already mentioned that despite the presence of a huge number of paintings by famous Soviet artists such as "Comrade Stalin at the maneuvers of the Belarusian Military District", the leader did not like and did not go to maneuvers and training grounds, but he went to the dungeons of the NKVD, and with great pleasure. Especially before the war.

Unfortunately, the events of June 22 somewhat changed the plans of Comrade Stalin, and therefore the investigators, without waiting for their beloved leader, were instructed to work independently "according to the investigation plan."

Despite the preliminary processing, or perhaps thanks to it, Meretskov immediately began to testify. At a confrontation with Stern, ignoring the latter's hysterical cries: "Kirill Afanasyevich, well, it didn't exist, it didn't exist, it didn't exist!", Meretskov testified that he was involved with Stern in a criminal group that worked for the German and English exploration at the same time. That the group periodically transferred abroad the most secret documents regarding the plans and weapons of the Red Army.

When asked who led the criminal group, Meretskov replied that he did not know. But it was difficult for an army general to pass himself off as an ordinary saboteur who did not know who was leading him.

actions. They immediately started beating him with rubber truncheons, fists and boots for new testimony. NKVD investigator Semyonov later recalled:

"I personally saw how brutally they beat Meretskov and Loktionov during the investigation. They didn't just moan, but simply roared in pain ... they acted especially brutally with Stern. There was no place left on it. At each interrogation, he lost consciousness several times ... Loktionov was severely beaten, covered in blood, his appearance also affected Meretskov, who denounced him. Loktionov refused, and Vlodzimirsky, Shvartsman and Rhodes continued to beat him in turn and together in front of Meretskov, who urged Loktionov to sign everything they wanted from him. Loktionov roared in pain, rolled on the floor, but did not agree ... "

Meretskov, writhing in pain, named his accomplices. He named Zhukov himself first, then Pavlov, Kirponos, Klenov and many others. Only the new commander of the North-Western Front, Colonel-General Fyodor Kuznetsov, is missing from his testimony. Oddly enough, he alone survived, although his chief of staff, Lieutenant General Klenov, was arrested and died during interrogation from a heart attack, and the front itself was defeated even worse than the Western one. General Pavlov was shot along with his entire staff. It is generally accepted that for the defeat and collapse of the Western Front. It is no longer possible to determine what exactly. In Kyiv, General of the Army Kirponos was shot dead by a special officer, according to the official version, he committed suicide (two shots from a revolver in the back of the head). Zhukov survived, but all his employees, from the chief of staff of General Telegin to the driver Bochin, were arrested ...

Meretskov continued to be dragged to confrontations. He exposed Smushkevich. He also testified against Rychagov. The famous fighter pilot, apparently, had already lost his mind by this time, because he began to behave extremely defiantly and even allowed himself verbal insults against the investigator Rhodes. This forced the latter to carry out his long-standing threat and arrest Rychagov's wife, Aviation Major Maria Nesterenko, who was captured right in the unit on June 24th. The motivation for the arrest was as follows: "... being Rychagov's beloved wife, she could not help but know about her husband's traitorous activities."

Nesterenko was a renowned pilot who repeatedly demonstrated extraordinary courage in the sky and a rare skill in flying an aircraft. "The same courage," Arkady Vaksberg, who specially studied her fate, writes about her, "she showed in the torture chamber, saving both herself and her husband from slanderous accusations ... I can't describe the tortures that this wonderful woman was subjected to. I don't even have the courage to do that..."

I also do not have the heart to describe how this woman was tortured. It is quite well known what was done to women in the dungeons of the NKVD. I will only say that the illustrious pilot, Major Maria Nesterenko, did not confess to anything, did not sign a single protocol, and in October 1941 she was shot with her husband [83].

While the investigators were horrified by the abyss of another bottomless military-counter-revolutionary conspiracy that had opened before them, the events at the front began to take the form of a military catastrophe unprecedented in history, which was watched with increasing horror from the Kremlin.

The huge Western Front was falling apart before our eyes. The desperate resistance of individual outposts, units and garrisons could not hide from the command the absolutely incredible behavior of the army. The history of wars has not yet known such a thing.

One and a half million people went over to the Germans with weapons in their hands. Some, with whole formations to the sounds of divisional orchestras.

Two million people surrendered, throwing down their weapons. (The word "weapon" means not only a rifle, but everything up to and including a tank and an aircraft.)

500 thousand people were captured under various circumstances.

1 million people frankly deserted (of which 657,354 people were caught, 10,200 were shot, the rest disappeared without a trace).

800 thousand people were killed and wounded.

Approximately a million people scattered through the forests.

The remaining 980,000 retreated east in a panic.

This was the situation in September 1941.

And this is precisely the biggest secret of the military catastrophe of 1941.

In the whirlwind of an unprecedented whirlpool, entire regiments of the division and even the corps disappeared without a trace. Entire squadrons went missing.

20 generals and 182432 officers of various ranks went missing. 106 generals, including several army commanders, were captured.

Almost unopposed, German troops occupied city after city, where monuments to Lenin and Stalin flew from pedestals.

A significant part of the population rejoiced, meeting the Germans with flowers, bread and salt.

They rejoiced, but, as it soon turned out, completely in vain.

The Germans did not bring liberation. They brought a new slavery and terror, presented with much greater frankness.

The German command was stunned.

The commanders of the army groups were quick to appreciate all the incredible benefits of the situation. They already had a millionth

Army armed. Another two million ready to fight the regime. It was organized and the Russian National people were potentially ready to join its ranks. It was considered very likely that, if this army were officially recognized, the remnants of the Red Army, scattered over the area and retreating in panic, would join it. Interacting with the Wehrmacht, this army would quickly liberate the country from the Stalinist regime.

The commanders of the army groups immediately reported this to Berlin, awaiting the Fuehrer's decision.

Hitler, who spent the whole week from July 19 to 25 on injections, at the end of July was cheerful, cheerful and excited.

He sent an "Explanation" to the commanders, where he pointed out to the idealist generals that "we are not freeing Russia from anything and from no one. We are her

we conquer (detente in the document. - I.B.). ... We do not need any Russian national army and are not going to form any Russian government ... We are interested in the Russian people only as a labor force that will work for the German nation in the future.

Die, you can't say it better!

Hitler again confirmed his "magnificent" political insight, missing the last chance to get out alive from this whole story.

All those who went over to the side of the Wehrmacht with weapons in their hands were ordered to disarm and declare prisoners of war.

Some made their way back to the Red Army and were, of course, shot. Some, at their own peril and risk, the Germans kept, distributing them among the units of the Wehrmacht [84].

The ferocious occupation regime established by the Germans in the occupied territories, the mass executions of civilians for the purpose of intimidation, the openly declared intention to turn all Russians without exception into working cattle, and much more hit the most sensitive strings of Russian patriotism.

Official propaganda immediately took advantage of this, replacing almost all of its pre-war slogans with national-patriotic ones and declaring the Patriotic War itself.

By the autumn of 1941, all signs of the beginning

people's war, and no one has ever been able to win a war against the people. But this did not change the anti-people and bestial nature of the Stalinist regime in the slightest.

If the German command was stunned by the events of the summer of 1941, then you can imagine how stunned Comrade Stalin and "his great marshals" were.

Being in full confidence that the educational measures with the Russian people carried out since 1917, the main of which was the constantly ongoing mass extermination of this people, finally turned it into a brainwashed, wordless mass, suitable only for grinding into camp, and now trench dust, comrade Stalin was shocked by the surprise that his beloved army gave him.

The perverted psychology cultivated in the communist anti-world made the leader himself believe that the Red Army soldiers and commanders (among whom there is practically no person who has not been shot, tortured, dispossessed, exiled, arrested, or one of his relatives, friends disappeared without a trace or friends)

they have lost all normal human feelings and emotions so much, they have mutated so much on the terrible path from an ordinary person to a Soviet person that they no longer have any other desires than to go on a campaign to win world domination for the criminal regime.

To the great honor of the Russian people, it must be said that this did not happen.

The events of the summer of 1941 can, without any exaggeration, be called a spontaneous uprising of the army against the Stalinist despotism.

The totalitarian regime in general, and the communist regime in particular, turns the country into one huge organized criminal group, where, along with unthinkably bloody crimes against their own people, there is a process of drawing the people themselves into the crimes of the regime with the imposition of collective responsibility on them.

for these crimes.

This creates a powerful mutual responsibility, cemented by blood and lies, as it should be in any organized criminal group.

Nowhere and never has this been demonstrated more clearly than in the powerful criminal gang that the former Russia has become thanks to two great godfathers - Lenin and Stalin.

Their calculation was theoretically almost flawless: the rest of the world would never be able to organize and arm itself in such a way as to resist their grand schemes of turning the whole Earth into a huge criminal zone.

But the great godfathers, due to their own limitations and illiteracy, not only did not see the patterns that govern world progress, they did not understand the processes uncontrollably developing in that primitive criminal system that they built on the bones of tens of millions of destroyed Russian people, intending to do good to it all mankind.

This is the process of self-liquidation embedded in the totalitarian system itself. This process is very interesting and deserves careful study.

Stalin clearly intended to start his campaign in Europe as early as 1938. However, as the cherished hour approached, the process of ruthless destruction of our own armed forces, the state apparatus, industry and, of course, the people began.

Let us assume for a moment that in the summer of 1941 everything happened as Comrade Stalin had planned. On June 19, Hitler would begin to withdraw troops from the Soviet border and, say, in late July - early August, invaded the British Isles, leaving the unprotected rear and his fate to the discretion of Comrade Stalin.

What would happen then?

The process of self-liquidation was already in full swing, gaining momentum. On June 22, General of the Army Meretskov had already been arrested, and the orgy of arrests in the army and industry that began in the USSR after the arrest of General Ivan Proskurov in July 1940 was still far from over. One can easily foresee what would happen next.

Timoshenko, Zhukov, Pavlov and Kirponos would be next under the knife, not to mention the military of a lower rank.

Would we not have bled so much by August that we would again be unable to move an arm or a leg?

A huge abscess matured and swelled on the body of the country, feverish it and threatening a general infection of the blood with all the ensuing consequences.

Hitler, having opened this abscess with his bayonet, without realizing it, rendered a great service

Comrade Stalin and his regime, extending their existence for years, which they actually did not have.

And for a long time pus gushed from this abscess before oceans of blood flowed.

When, after the war, having got his hands on nuclear and hydrogen weapons, Stalin, having unleashed a war in Korea, again began feverishly preparing his 8 millionth army for a campaign,

the parallel process of self-liquidation that began this time destroyed him, his entire punitive and slave-owning apparatus, and ultimately the Soviet Union.

So errors in the third sign, gradually accumulating, destroyed the leader himself and his empire.

But back to 1941.

Stalin was perhaps one of the first to appreciate Hitler's gift.

The fact that his almost 9 million army ceased to exist, having evaporated like a drop of dew under the rays of the sun, shocked him, but not so much as to completely lose his head.

He quickly saw what opportunities Hitler's incredible stupidity and racial insanity offered him.

In August, Stalin made a landmark statement, the meaning of which became clear much later. "We have no prisoners of war," the leader said, "we have traitors to the Motherland" [85]. He had every reason to make such a statement. In the hands of the Germans by this time were 4.2 million prisoners of war of the Red Army, including Stalin's own son, Yakov Dzhugashvili.

Then Stalin gives order No. 220 (not to be confused with the later order No. 227 "Not a step back!"), where, without any "new talk", in simple and understandable language, all military personnel at the front are informed that their

families in the rear become hostages of their behavior at the front. In case of surrender, the families will be repressed. At best, they are starved to death, because they will not be given ration cards. The servicemen themselves will be shot at one suspicion of unwillingness to fight. Can you imagine how these servicemen would have behaved if the Russian National Liberation Army had been created by that time?

Then Stalin announces total mobilization, starting to form the so-called "people's militia" divisions, throwing completely untrained contingents under German tanks, consisting mainly of elderly and sick people who were not previously covered by the "Mobilization Plan-41".

The leader no longer trusts his army.

Capitulated by Hitler to an alliance with the "great democracies", Stalin humbly asks the British and Americans to send their troops to the Soviet-German front to replace the unreliable units of the Red Army.

He tearfully humiliates himself before those whom only yesterday he despised and hated.

Meanwhile, on our side of the front, a ferocious police-terrorist regime reigns no better than on the side where the Nazi army is in charge.

Meanwhile, the still unprecedented military flywheel, launched in February 1941 by the Mobilization Plan-41, continues to unwind.

By the beginning of 1942, another 420 rifle, 120 (!) Cavalry divisions, 250 tank brigades, hundreds of artillery and aviation regiments were being formed. Practically untrained, they rush into the meat grinder of war, being exterminated almost without exception.

As the war becomes more and more Patriotic, Stalin, having returned his former confidence, and with it his former contempt for his country and its "population", does not forget to bestow this population with his new favors.

After the victory at Stalingrad, he gives the people the death penalty by hanging and hard labor.

After the victory at the Kursk Bulge, all Kalmyks are sent to the regions of the Far North.

After Operation Citadel, all Tatars are deported from Crimea to Northern Kazakhstan within 24 hours.

After crossing the old Soviet border - Chechens and Ingush.

The plans for the total resettlement of all Balts, Poles, Germans, Romanians, Hungarians, Czechs and even Ukrainians with Jews are almost ready. Operation Thunderstorm continues!

The capture of Eastern Europe leads to the temptation to finish what was planned before the war.

The "Sovietization" of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania, Yugoslavia, parts of Germany, Korea, China (!), parts of Vietnam was carried out.

To do this, another 30 million Russian people had to be destroyed, but this, as always, worried the leader very little.

"During collectivization, we lost more," he dismissed Churchill when he tried to come out with his condolences about such monstrous losses of the USSR.

One more effort - and a bright dream will come true!

Everything was clearly moving towards this.

However, on the line of confrontation is no longer a beggarly Wehrmacht, but a huge global American army armed with nuclear weapons, aviation and navy of unprecedented power.

But the obsession is stronger!

The clear intention of the leader of all nations who has finally fallen into madness to unleash a nuclear war horrifies his old accomplices. The aging leader, without a moment's hesitation, as befits the old "godfather", decides to liquidate them. All: Molotov, Voroshilov, Zhukov, Beria, Kaganovich and Malenkov. Everyone who has not yet died a natural death, like Zhdanov and Shcherbakov.

In the metastases of the process of self-destruction, the leader himself and most of his accomplices perish.

They are dying, but Operation Thunderstorm remains!

It takes on new forms, repeatedly bringing the world to the brink of a thermonuclear catastrophe.

Again, millions of soldiers and tens of thousands of tanks vibrate on the line of confrontation, where any spark can at any moment grow into a new world fire.

Fat red arrows "Thunderstorm" reach out to Cuba, Ethiopia, Yemen, Angola,

Cambodia and Vietnam, leaving everywhere, millions of dead, starved to death, rotting in the camps.

The great flywheel of militarization launched by Stalin continues to forge more and more mountains of weapons, flooding the country and the whole world with them.

But again begins to pick up speed, unnoticed due to an error in the third sign, the process of self-destruction.

It turns out that the militarization of the country can continue up to a certain limit.

Having famously skipped this limit, the Stalinist empire collapses, crumbles, and its fragments, rapidly flying forward, Time sweeps to the sidelines of history.

On August 30 and 31, 1994, the former Soviet, and now Russian troops finally left the territories of Germany and the Baltic states. Russian President Boris Yeltsin and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl did everything possible to give this event at least some solemnity. It was sad, because an entire era was leaving in the past.

Exactly 55 years after its start, Operation Thunderstorm ended.

Is it forever?..

St. Petersburg, spring 1993 - spring 1995.

## Notes

1

Although it has not been conclusively established for what Hitler received his awards, the mere case of awarding a private of the Kaiser's army in one war with two Iron Crosses II and I class is unique and suggests a very significant feat.

2

In Soviet historical literature, the Nazi party is bashfully called not "National Socialist", but "Socialist", although there is no such word in either German or Russian.

3



Of course, Hitler's regime in Germany was much softer and more flexible than Stalin's in the USSR. Hitler never engaged in mass extermination of his own people. Having preserved the mechanism of competition and introduced into it the "socialist competition" stolen in Moscow, he achieved major economic successes. The son of the deposed Kaiser, August-Wilhelm, was admitted to the National Socialist Party, which caused a whole storm from the "left" Nazis. Is it possible to imagine Stalin accepting someone from the Romanov family into the party?

4

For all their outward dissimilarity, Stalin and Hitler had much in common in character traits and fate. It is interesting to note that the women they loved ended up the same way. Nadezhda Alliluyeva and Geli Ruabab were found with bullets in their heads. Both shot themselves, unable to withstand the demonic power and tyranny masquerading as love. Vengeful history almost categorically believes that Geli was shot by Hitler, and Nadia by Stalin.

5

On August 22, 1939, the day before the signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, 10 days before the invasion of Poland, Hitler told his generals: "The removal of Litvinov was decisive. For me it sounded like a cannon shot announcing a change in Moscow's attitude towards Western countries.

6

Interestingly, at the same time, President Roosevelt, having gathered leading US financiers in the White House, asked how much Hitler had the means to carry out his policy. The bankers, having delved into the ledgers, replied that if peacetime lasted, then until 1948, if Hitler was drawn into the war this year, then until 1942 - no more.

7

Back in early 1938, "Jewish circles" promised Stalin unlimited credit and a complete modernization of the army if he attacked Hitler. Stalin ordered to answer that "if the Soviet Union is subjected to fascist aggression, it will gratefully accept the support of all progressive and peace-loving mankind." The "circles" who did not speak "novorech" decided that Stalin, saving face, asked them to organize a "fascist

aggression." They took note of it.

8

One of the residents of Soviet intelligence, Krivitsky, having fled to the West, gave extensive testimony, including Kim Philby as a Soviet agent. The British, however, did not react to this in any way, and Philby held leading positions in British intelligence for a long time, transmitting streams of carefully thought-out disinformation to the USSR right up to 1961. The ways of intelligence are inscrutable!

9

It is interesting to note that in the edition of the Anglo-Polish union treaty drawn up by the British, it was said so "in the event of German aggression." Only Germany! The government of England, which knew perfectly well the intention of the USSR to invade Poland from the east, nevertheless did not extend the treaty to the USSR, confident that the USSR and Germany would inevitably clash in the division of booty.

10

Every word in this note is saturated with lies. The Polish government was in the town of Kutu near the Romanian border. As for Warsaw, the capital of Poland was captured by the Germans only on September 27th. However, in an effort to get help from the east as soon as possible, the Germans already on September 9 announced the capture of Warsaw.

eleven

True losses amounted to 5327 people. Killed 1386

12

One can only be surprised that any of these people survived. Among them were General Jaruzelski - the former President of Poland, the former Prime Minister of Israel Begin, the famous scientist Kowalski and some others.

13

All the circumstances of the Gleiwitz provocation have long been investigated, its participants have been named, and the head of the "operation" Sturmbannführer Alfred Nauoks even wrote extensive memoirs under the heading "The Man Who Started the War." Nothing has yet been written about the "Mainil provocation". Of course, there was no investigation, either state or journalistic. However, participants in the events unanimously say that the shelling was carried out by a special NKVD team that arrived on the Karelian Isthmus from Leningrad. At the disposal of the team, consisting of 15 people, there was one horse-drawn gun. Major of the NKVD Okunevich commanded this group. Okunevich himself (died in 1986) said that they were sent to the Karelian Isthmus with an order to test the action of an allegedly new secret projectile, indicating the exact location of the shooting, as well as the direction, goniometer, etc. The team was accompanied by two "ballistics" specialists who arrived from Moscow. According to Okunevich, the gun fired not 7, but 5 shells.

14

Two months before the war, at a meeting of the Military Council, Voroshilov smashed the plan of Shaposhnikov, who took the Mannerheim line very seriously and highly appreciated the combat training of the Finnish army. Shaposhnikov believed that the war would be long and that the offensive was impossible without the preliminary destruction of the concrete defensive structures of the Finns by artillery and aircraft. In the meantime, Shaposhnikov believed, the army should have been prepared for war in the harsh northern winter: put on skis, put on winter uniforms, and engage in individual combat training for each soldier.

15

The Finns calculated their losses in the war, as expected, with an accuracy of one person. They lost 23,542 people killed and missing, 43,501 people were wounded (of which 9,872 people remained disabled). The Soviet Union, of course, did not count its losses so scrupulously, operating in tens of thousands. Even closed sources give different figures: in one - 340 thousand people, in the other - 540 thousand people. The late General Novikov, a former employee of the personnel department of the NPO, explained to the author that the first figure is the number of deaths from wounds and frostbite, and the second is the total losses, taking into account those killed and missing. In addition to the known figures, we must also add 843 Red Army servicemen who were shot by the verdict of military tribunals "for negative" statements about this shameful war.

16

The whole, in any case, the official goal of this shameful war, which the USSR did not hesitate to impose on its tiny neighbor, was allegedly to ensure the strategic security of Leningrad and the entire North-West. What has been achieved?

17

How many were there? Soviet sources, as always striking in accuracy, speak of "more than 5 thousand." A. Solzhenitsyn claims that there were 25 thousand of them. All of them were loaded into trains, in which coils of barbed wire were carried on one of the platforms. Delivered to the regions of the Arctic, the former prisoners themselves fenced off their "zone", and then dug dugouts. Not almost no one survived.

18

Hitler's hopes for the new Enigma cipher system, like many of his other hopes, did not come true. In February 1940, the British, having sunk the German boat "38" in the Clyde Bay, raised both the Enigma itself and all the cipher documentation for it from it, providing themselves for the entire war.

19

Dr. Theodor Morell appeared near the Fuhrer in 1935 and did not part with him until the very end. Hitler did not trust a single person as much as he did, and Morell's country house was the only one where Hitler, without protection, went to "drink tea." No one still knows how Morell injected Hitler, sometimes three or four times a day. Morell himself refused to talk about it, and all attempts by other doctors to turn Hitler against the doctor, or at least to arouse concern in Hitler about the obscure nature of the drugs with which he was injected, did not lead to anything. The doctor got into Hitler's intimate circle under the patronage of the photographer Hoffmann, a person as dark as Morell himself.

20

When Guderian's tanks, destroying the Soviet defenses, rapidly advanced deep into the territory of the USSR, the whole story repeated itself. The German command, including Hitler himself, made every effort to stop the indomitable general. Again Guderian rushed forward, ignoring the orders of the command of Army Group Center and Hitler himself. In pursuit of him flew orders to remove him from office and to put him on trial. By Hitler's personal order, Guderian was stopped near Yelnya, and his entire group aimed at Moscow was turned south. This saved Moscow from an inevitable fall.

21

Wherever German tank units entered the zone of operation of naval artillery, they

stopped for a long time or permanently. Suffice it to recall the defense of Tallinn in August 1941, where the KBF formation, which consisted of only one cruiser and a dozen destroyers, held back the attack on the port, which had virtually no land defense, for two months. Or the famous Oranienbaum Piglet, shot through by ships and forts of Kronstadt, which the Germans were never able to take during their entire three-year trample near Leningrad.

22

Later, Field Marshal Rundstedt expressed his attitude towards Operation Sea Lion, which he was to command:

23

Who was this old man? Although the answer suggests itself, one must be very careful, for the most obvious answers are often the most wrong ones. The facts are as follows: in the former country mansion of the Moscow merchant Kumanin, in the mid-20s, the so-called. "Special Object 17". After 1934, only Stalin and Yagoda had access to this facility. Yezhov, apparently, did not even know about the existence of the Kumanin dacha. The guards were categorically, under pain of execution on the spot, forbidden to go to the shore of the lake. Sometimes food and some boxes were brought there, but they were piled on the shore. At night, everything was transported to the island by an old boatman, who, according to some rumors, was deaf-and-dumb, and according to others, he was simply very withdrawn. Residents of neighboring villages knew about "object 17", but they were sure that there was a secret laboratory inventing deadly rays to destroy enemy aircraft. Quite in the spirit of the times.

24

"Lenin" did not wait for the German cruiser, because according to the plan of the operation, the Shch-423 submarine was sailing parallel to the course of the raider, supposedly being ferried from Murmansk to Vladivostok, which, upon receiving a special encrypted signal, should drown the German raider with torpedoes if the changing situation required it .

25

Such a decision by Hitler is considered a major strategic mistake. Having the main task of destroying enemy aircraft, the Germans sent an average of 1,000 aircraft a day from August 24 to September 6 to achieve this goal. Despite the desperate and valiant resistance of the British pilots, the numerical superiority of the Germans began to show. The five forward airfields of the British in the south of the country were so badly damaged that they could hardly be used. The communication system was

violated. In the critical two weeks from August 24 to September 6, the British lost 466 fighters destroyed or seriously damaged. In this case, 103 pilots were killed and 128 were seriously injured - about a quarter of the available staff. During the same period, the Luftwaffe lost 385 aircraft (214 fighters and 138 bombers).

26

On September 3, permission came to the distant Arctic for the Comet to proceed further. The icebreaker "Kaganovich" accompanied the cruiser to the east for some time, and then, raising the signal: "I wish you a happy voyage," turned back.

27

People's Commissar Timoshenko awarded Vlasov with a gold watch. A little later, Stalin himself ordered Vlasov to be awarded the Order of Lenin, and the 99th division - the challenge Red Banner of the Red Army.

28

A little over seven months later, woken up at dawn on June 22, 1941, by the news of the German attack on the USSR, Churchill, in his first public speech on this subject, would say: "The worst features of communism are inherent in the Nazi regime ... Over the past 25 years, no one has been a more consistent opponent communism than me. I will not take back a single word that I said about him... But the past, with its crimes, follies and tragedies, disappears. For Hitler is worse and more dangerous than Stalin!"

29

This is how misinformation breeds new misinformation, increasing the overall error.

thirty

In 1942, Stalin, retelling this episode to Churchill, reported that Molotov allegedly remarked to Ribbentrop: "If you assure that England lost the war, then why are we sitting in this shelter? And whose bombs are falling so close that their explosions can be heard even here? Ribbentrop said nothing. There was nothing of the sort, of course.

31

But the Germans did not rest on this. A new expedition to test the "concavity" of the earth was organized in April 1942 - this time on the island of Rügen. The expedition was led by Dr. Heinz Fischer, Germany's most famous specialist in the study of infrared rays.

32

There are interesting, almost mystical parallels in the fate of Hitler and Roosevelt. The same day in January was celebrated by both: for Hitler it was the day of his appointment as Chancellor of Germany, for Roosevelt it was his birthday. Only one day separated them in March 1933, when both gained the right to power: the day of Roosevelt's inauguration coincided with the vote in the Reichstag, which gave Hitler dictatorial powers.

33

Stalin's eldest son Yakov, who was captured by the Germans in the first days of the war, turned into a kind of nightmare for Stalin. The Germans printed leaflets and newspapers in millions of copies with various appeals and articles by Yakov directed against his father. Although all this is officially declared fake, one can imagine how much they spoiled the blood of Stalin. The only thing he could do in response was to imprison Yulia Meltzer as an "accomplice" in his son's crimes.

34

Therefore, it is impossible to condemn Stalin too strictly that he achieved Vasily's divorce from Galina Burdonskaya and married his son to the daughter of Marshal Timoshenko Ekaterina. When the daughter Svetlana gave her father the first surprise by marrying some brave Jew, Stalin, having already accumulated some experience, quickly stopped the marriage and married his daughter to Zhdanov's son, Yuri. After the death of Stalin, in the best traditions of the terrorist medieval power he created, his son Vasily was immediately arrested, then exiled to Kazan, where he died under mysterious circumstances. Svetlana managed to escape to the United States, where she publicly burned her Soviet passport. These were the first stones of the landslide collapse of ideology. These facts are well known, and if we mentioned them, then only to emphasize once again that the leader should not have children without providing them with hereditary power. But, if he does have children, he must raise them himself, without entrusting this matter to illiterate sergeants from state security.

35

We have already written that the best forces of the country's creative intelligentsia were mobilized to ensure the Stalinist conquests. Soviet culture selflessly worked for Operation Thunderstorm, knowing nothing about its existence. Read the words of this song and think: was there any other ideology in the world that could give such a lyrical character to aggressive campaigns? This is not German for you: "Wir wird marchieren."

36

Between September 1940 and approximately until 1945, an unprecedented construction of new concentration camps began in the USSR, although the former Gulag system coped without expansion with the annual intake of about a million new prisoners under the Stalinist order. This is understandable given the high death rate in the camps. For whom were the new "zones" built? Here is an interesting order of Stalin (No. 7161 of December 16, 1944): "In the period from December 25, 1944 to January 10, 1945, to mobilize and interne for work in the USSR all able-bodied German men aged 17 to 45 years and women from 18 to 30 years old ... "And rightly so, everyone will say, remembering what the Germans did on our land. But the order has a continuation: "Citizens of Germany and Hungary, as well as citizens of Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, are subject to mobilization, regardless of their positions and duties performed ... You are allowed to take clothes and a 15-day supply of food with you ..." Where they were going to deliver them all two weeks? The order was canceled because the destroyed transport infrastructure of the USSR and Eastern Europe simply did not allow it to be carried out. But there was a desire.

37

The "special folder" still keeps documents that are afraid to make public even under our new regime. Suffice it to recall that it was in the "Special Folder", when needed, that they found the "Secret Protocols" of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the order of the Politburo (with all signatures) on the execution of the Poles in Katyn. And in the "folder" 100,000 units of storage.

38

This "Society" did not stop its activities both during the war years and in the post-war years. All ties were finally cut off only after the execution of Beria and his closest associates. Someday, multi-volume editions of the contents of the "special folder" will become the most read books of the era. But everyone born before 1956 must die first.

39



Exhausted by Sorge's messages about the inevitability of Hitler's attack on the USSR, Stalin ordered in May 1941 to "surrender" Sorge to Japanese counterintelligence. Arrested in October 1941, Sorge allegedly (official version) admitted that he was a citizen of the USSR. However, according to the same official version, he was sentenced to death through hanging.

40

Looking ahead, we note that the lack of diplomatic experience, ignorance and misunderstanding of the international situation, blind and servile adherence to Stalin's guidelines, fitting information to these guidelines, the constant search for "imperialist conspiracies" turned Dekanozov - the first resident ambassador in history - into one of the main culprits the most crushing defeat of Soviet intelligence.

41

Merkulov managed to survive under Stalin. After the war, he personally supervised the destruction of almost two million Balts, and was involved in numerous other crimes of that era. He was shot already after the death of Stalin, along with his benefactor Lavrenty Pavlovich, when he considered himself completely safe.

42

Pay attention to the date again. September 1940. The height of friendship. There is also no trace of the Barbarossa plan.

43

The activity of the noble People's Commissar of the Navy in saving sailors from the fangs of the Stalinist NKVD is worthy of a separate book. This applied not only to admirals, but also to any sailors and even civilian employees. There are some very interesting documents on this subject. Let's say a student is arrested on charges of preparing a "terrorist attack." He is required to name all the members of the "terrorist organization" by name. Having received a couple of times on the ears from the investigator, the student lists all his acquaintances, among whom is a naval lieutenant. The lieutenant is summoned to the NKVD and shown the statement of the unfortunate student. In the vast majority of cases, the lieutenant denies everything, writes an explanation on this occasion, and they let him go in peace. But there were cases when a naval officer, out of fear (or for some other unknown reason), admitted everything that was written. They laughed at him and let him go too. This is a privilege that sailors had from 1939 to 1941, thanks to the courage of Admiral Kuznetsov. And he remained that way until the end of his days.

44

Communist ideologues among many myths created one of the most striking. This is a myth about the general innocence of all Stalin's victims from among the top leaders of the army, state security and industry. In reality, it wasn't quite like that. From 1930 to 1941 There have been at least three major coup attempts in the USSR. And with different political orientations. The main forces of the conspiracies were, of course, the state security, the struggle within which never stopped; army and party nomenklatura.

45

It should be noted that by June 22, 1941, Germany, together with its allies, had 4,275 aircraft on the Eastern Front, i.e., almost one and a half times less than the USSR had only training aircraft in 1940.

46

Viktor Suvorov, in his wonderful book "M Day", describes in detail this Stalinist "innovation" of November 7, 1940, but considers it caused by economic reasons - not a single army in the world, including the Red Army, could contain such a number of officers.

47

American observers who first saw the KV near Moscow in December 1941 were horrified and amazed. None of them even imagined that such monsters could be riveted in peacetime.

48

This report was returned to the GRU when General Zhukov was already Chief of the General Staff. On the report was his resolution: "I don't need this. Report how many refuelings of fuel were used for one car.

49

So one day, Hitler found out that the head of his bodyguard, SS Gruppenführer Hans Rattenhuber, had Himmler's order to report daily on everything that he saw or heard while communicating with the Führer. Hitler summoned the entire leadership of the SS and, in the presence of Rattenhuber himself, yelled at Reichsführer SS Himmler: "I repeat once again that you, Himmler, have no right to order Rattenhuber. I forbid you this! And if you, Rattenhuber, report anything else about me to Himmler, you will be immediately imprisoned!" How would Stalin act in such a situation?

50

As you know, Lenin unsuccessfully but zealously tried to kindle a proletarian revolution in the United States, which, under American freedom, seemed to the leader easily provoked and "doomed to win." Hitler, as we have already noted, considered it just as easy to start an Aryan revolution in the United States, relying on 30 million American Germans and on anti-Semitism. Neither one nor the other succeeded, but they apparently did not have time to think about this topic.

51

Hitler only before his very end was able, although not completely, to appreciate Roosevelt, realizing that he had tightened the noose around his throat, throwing it like a lasso from across the ocean at the end of 1940. He rejoiced at the death of Roosevelt like a child, even temporarily forgetting about his inevitable end, which happened two weeks later.

52

Later it turned out that it was Canaris who convinced the hesitant Franco not to mess with Hitler. "You may be surprised," the admiral said, "but you can believe me - Hitler will lose this war to smithereens."

53

Heydrich had long ago launched a whole pack of his agents in Müller's footsteps, including a certain Hermann Keller, a monk of the Benedictine monastery of Beuron. Keller was a double agent: he worked for both the Abwehr and the SD. At the end of 1939, he met in Switzerland with another Abwehr agent, the Berlin lawyer Echait, who, knowing Keller from his work in the Abwehr, told that a conspiracy against Hitler was being prepared in Germany, led by Generals Halder, Beck and Hammerstein. The lawyer also told the monk that Joseph Müller regularly travels to Rome to contact the English

intelligence. Returning to Germany, he handed over the report, first to the Abwehr, and then to the SD. The largest of Heydrich's subordinates, who worked for the Abwehr, was the head of the imperial criminal police, SS Gruppenführer Artur Nebe, who by this time had secretly lost faith in National Socialism. He exposed Keller as a "double". He also said that Heydrich considered this report so important that he even honored Keller with a personal conversation. Nebe managed to get Keller's report and forward it to the Abwehr. Then Keller, as an agent of the Abwehr, was summoned to Oster's deputy, Major Donany, who "split" the monk and forced him to convey the conversation with Heydrich. At the same time, it turned out that Heydrich considered the arrest of Muller a matter of the next few days.

54

The leak of information that came from the OKW is simply astounding. Suffice it to say that the plan "Barbarossa" within two weeks after its signing became the prey of almost all the intelligence agencies of the world, even those who were completely uninterested in receiving it. One of the first to receive this plan, for example, was Argentine intelligence, which for some time simply did not know what to do with it, and then resold it to the British, who had already received

this plan through its channels.

55

Here is what the Soviet official history writes about this: "Comparing the estimates given by the German intelligence of the Red Army in 1940-1941 with the actual size and power of the Soviet Armed Forces, one cannot help but come to the conclusion about a major miscalculation of the Nazi intelligence agencies, which later became one of reasons for the defeat of the Wehrmacht. Thus, German intelligence underestimated: the number of rifle divisions in the Red Army by 1.3 times, aircraft - by 2.8 times; she did not have clear information about the number of tanks that the Red Army had ... As for Soviet tanks ... there was completely no information about the new Soviet tanks "T-34" and "KB", the appearance of which on the battlefield in 1941 came as a surprise to the Nazi army " . D. M. Proektor, "Aggression and catastrophe", Moscow, 1968

56

All this is extremely funny, given that the Germans were inferior to the Red Army in terms of tanks in a ratio of 1:5, in aircraft - 1:6, in artillery - 1:8, indeed surpassing the Red Army only in communications, then the question arises: how could such an experienced intelligence service as the Abwehr, to make such a miscalculation? Not a single intelligence service in the world, even the most inexperienced, has ever made miscalculations by more than 1.5 - rarely 2 times. And then 5-8 times! Moreover, with the outbreak of the war, the Abwehr, as if by magic, began to unexpectedly give completely accurate data about the enemy. But these data were already such that Hitler simply did not want to listen to them.

57

Commenting on this document, Soviet official history notes: "The Hitlerite military leadership believed that the Soviet Union was able to field 209 divisions during general mobilization, in other words, add 59 divisions to the already existing ones. In fact, in the summer of 1941 alone, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command of the Red Army sent more than 324 divisions to the front.

58

Zhukov's leadership methods were purely Stalinist: complete contempt for people as the cheapest consumables. An interesting description was given to the late marshal by Viktor Suvorov, the author of the famous book "Icebreaker": "Of course, there was nothing ingenious in Zhukov ... there was not a single situation in which Zhukov would defeat the enemy with lesser forces. He always had more tanks, more artillery, more ammunition, more people whom he could drive to death quite calmly, without thinking about the consequences and the value of human life ... He kept everything on executions, ... he plugged holes with the bodies of thousands and millions of people ... "

59

Dark as the waters of our history may be, there is much to see if one dives deep enough. As you know, Hitler ignored the possibility of creating a one and a half million strong Russian liberation army in the summer of 1941 (which we will talk about later), refusing to listen to the arguments of many of his generals. All the strange details of the surrender of General Vlasov in July 1942 will become clearer if we assume that he was delegated to Germany in order to convince Hitler of the need to create such an army. By whom, we do not yet know specifically, but it is safe to say that there were forces in the Soviet military leadership who saw more benefit in overthrowing Stalin than in resisting Hitler.

60

In his memoirs, Colonel Novobranets writes: "I am surprised by Zhukov's statement that "a sudden transition to the offensive on such a scale, moreover, all available and deployed forces at once, i.e. We did not foresee the nature of the strike itself in its entirety."

61

In his memoirs, the late Colonel Rookie writes: "We must pay tribute to the German intelligence: with its disinformation, it managed to deftly deceive our government, to hide military preparations against us from it. Employees of the Intelligence Agency concentrated the fight against disinformation primarily around the number of enemy divisions. We showed their true number, and German intelligence tried in every possible way to hide it or reduce it: in addition, we were assured that Germany would strike at England and thereby expose its rear to our blow. In this struggle, German intelligence defeated us. The Soviet government and military leadership believed enemy disinformation, not their own intelligence. Even the head of the Intelligence Department himself did not believe her, and systematically, every week, more and more "cut off" the number of German divisions, adjusting our intelligence to Putnik's message. In the memoirs of Marshal Zhukov, it is said that on April 4, 1941 (!) According to the General Staff, there were 72-73 divisions against the USSR. This is the Traveler's data. As early as December 1940, our military intelligence reported in intelligence report No. 8 that 110 divisions were concentrated against the USSR, of which 11 were tank divisions. How did it happen that as of April 1941 there were 73 of them? 38 divisions less? This is the work of the head of the Intelligence Directorate, General Golikov. He simply removed 38 divisions from the register and slipped Colonel Putnik's misinformation to the General Staff. On the diagram of the location of German troops on our borders, given in the book of Marshal Zhukov ... I recognize Putnik's diagram.

62

With the exception of the poster "The Motherland Calls", created at the same time, this poster was the most popular in the early days of the war. Then his words changed a little. Instead of "Forward to the West" they began to write "Forward to victory." On the original poster, among other data, there is also the usual date of signing for printing: "December 25, 1940." Order first. The same is on the poster "The Motherland Calls!", which was considered a backup if things did not go as we would like. By the evening of June 22, both posters appeared on the walls of houses.

63

I somehow came across a document where the losses of the Red Army in the war were defined as follows: 8.5 million killed and 22 million died from wounds (almost half from tetanus).

64

Several documents have recently been published, which are reports from the leadership of the MGB addressed to Stalin, on the scope of the robberies arranged by Zhukov in the occupied territories of Germany for personal enrichment. Carriages with furniture, paintings, gold and diamonds, kilometers of manufactory, hundreds of forks and spoons, etc. up to several thousand pairs of ladies' stockings.

65

In addition to the USSR, no one in the world had any heavy tanks.

66

In total, from October 1940 to May 1941, Hitler sent 6 personal letters to Stalin. We managed to find two. The rest of the letters have not yet been found. Stalin's answers have not yet been found, although it is known where they are stored. They just don't let anyone in there.

67

They soon met, however, because Rado, as director of the Geo-Press cartographic publishing house, completed Rossler's order for the production of maps for his article analyzing Wehrmacht strategy.

68

Obviously, the distribution of forces in the game, taken from a top-secret document. Could the "Western" forces attack the "Eastern" with such an inequality of forces, especially since the aircraft of the "Eastern" in the game delivered a sudden blow to the "Western"? However, without batting an eyelid, our military historians, obeying the general policy of falsifying the true events of those days, are trying to convince us of the opposite: the "Western" should have attacked first, and then the "Eastern" should have defeated them. "Western," writes, for example, Zhukov's biographer V. Karpov, "strike with the forces of 150-160 divisions." Well, where could 150 divisions come from in Zhukov's three armies? There are at most 40 of them, as in the scheme of Colonel Putnik, planted by our General Staff. Of course, it was the other way around. At the first stage of the game, the strike was delivered by the Eastern, and then unforeseen events began.

69

Zhukov himself recalls this game in his memoirs: "The game abounded in dramatic moments for the eastern side. They turned out to be in many ways similar to those that arose after July 22, 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union.

70

Here is how Zhukov himself describes this scene in his "lubok" memoirs: "...I. V. Stalin

said: "The Politburo has decided to dismiss Meretskov from the post of Chief of the General Staff and appoint you." I expected everything, but not such a decision, and, not knowing what to answer, was silent. Then he said: "I have never worked in headquarters. Always been on the line. I can't be the Chief of the General Staff."

71

It is interesting to note with what unanimity all the military, without blushing, blame Stalin for everything that led to June 22, 1941. Stalin's guilt in the disaster is enormous, but it should be remembered that he was a civilian and proceeded in his policy from what was reported to him

military.

72

Stalin's love for bureaucracy, from the depths of which he grew like an ominous mushroom, forced him to fix on paper such things that, it would seem, should never have been documented. The Katyn case is just flowers. Was the great leader really so limited that he did not understand, at least from numerous examples of the past, that HISTORY would inevitably gut all these documents from his "Special Folder"? After all, for the same liquidation of the Poles, at that time, an oral instruction was enough. The same questions arose during the Nuremberg Trials. Why did the Nazis document all their crimes, hoping that they would live for 1000 years in steel safes. And after 12 years, all these documents have already been published. History teaches: the more secret the document, the more violently it rushes to freedom.

73

In the entire Katyn tragedy, one question is of greatest interest, to which, for some reason, no one pays attention. During the liquidation of Polish officers, German weapons were used. This made it possible to later shift all the blame for this massacre onto the Germans.

74

How can one not remember that, among other things, the Americans during the war delivered 12 million automobile, aviation and artillery tires to the USSR. Of course, Comrade Stalin did not think about such trifles. And Hitler too. But Stalin received more than 150,000 heavy American trucks, and Hitler had to come up with the wildest improvisations, such as exchanging 10,000 Jews for one American Studebaker.



75

It is interesting to note that the head of the newborn American intelligence, William Donovan, ordered the famous American psychoanalyst Professor Langer to conduct a psychological analysis of the personalities of Hitler and Stalin. As a result of studying the biographies of European leaders, analyzing information about their inclinations, behavior in various situations, their obsessions (about their own messianic role with the Fuhrer, about "communism as a bright future for all mankind" with Stalin), suicidal tendencies that manifested themselves in Hitler in 1933 year, and Stalin's in 1936, Professor Langer came to the conclusion that the famous psychiatrists Bekhterev and Kronfeld had come to before him, which said that Hitler was a psychopath, and Stalin was paranoid. The difference between the two terms is that the term "psychopath" refers to the disease in its acute form, while "paranoid" refers to the chronic form.

76

Having launched a campaign of Great Russian chauvinism (with obligatory anti-Semitism) in the USSR, Stalin himself was torn apart by complexes of his own national inferiority. He even forbade the Georgian actor Gelovani to play himself in numerous films, saying, to the great surprise of his close associates: "Stalin is a Russian man, and a Russian should play him."

77

Some time later, while in Rome, Matsuoka explained to the Pope that his country was fighting not against the Chinese, but against Bolshevism, which was supported by the Anglo-Saxons, who, in essence, were also Bolsheviks. This is dangerous for Japan, because everyone there hates Bolshevism, which denies religion and democracy. He does not understand Hitler, admitted Matsuoka, who turned the Anti-Comintern Pact into some kind of laughing stock.

78

For the most inquisitive, I give a source of data on the implementation of MP-41: TsAMO, f. 15A, he. 2154, d. 4, l. 199-287. (I.B.)

79

For readers who are not very familiar with operational planning, we point out that the cited Thunderstorm plan, approved by the Kremlin, was an operational war plan. Such a plan is a concentrated expression of the military doctrine adopted in

state.

80

Marshal Zhukov notes in his memoirs that the Germans concentrated 3,712 tanks and 4,950 combat aircraft on our borders. There were a little less of them, but let's not quibble, but compare them with the above figures taken from the most conservative source: VIZh No. 11/89.

81

I have no evidence yet, but I consider it legitimate to ask the question: what did Zhukov have to do with this new bacchanalia of arrests in the army? We show only the largest figures, and, of course, many more people were arrested. Can it be considered a mere coincidence that a new wave began immediately after the appointment of Zhukov as Chief of the General Staff, covering so many participants in the battles at Khalkhin Gol?

82

All ships survived until the start of the war and were, of course, captured by the enemy. Only "Magnitogorsk" under the command of Captain S. G. Dalk tried to leave Danzig, but was stopped and captured.

83

Not all Kremlin "miracles" have a real explanation. In September 1941, Stalin unexpectedly ordered the release of Meretskoy, Vannikov, Batov and several others. All the rest, including Proskurov, Rychagov with his wife, Smushkevich, Loktionov, Savchenko, Sakrier, Stern, Zasesov, Volodin, Sklizkov, Arzheuhin, Kayukov, Sobornov, Taubin, Rozov, Rozova-Yegorova, Bulatov and Fibikh were shot. Philip Goloshchekin, the "regicide", also got into this company.

84

All these events took place from June to approximately September 1941. In February 1942, a special commission from Germany was engaged in counting the Russians who served among the Germans in various units of the Wehrmacht. And I counted those 1 million 100 thousand.

85

It would be more honest to say "traitors to the party, government and the NKVD."